Information structure, agreement and disagreement in English and French asynchronous online discussion

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INFORMATION STRUCTURE, AGREEMENT AND DISAGREEMENT IN ENGLISH AND FRENCH ASYNCHRONOUS ONLINE DISCUSSION

by

PATRICK RODRIGUE BELIBI ENAMA

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INFORMATION STRUCTURE, AGREEMENT AND
DISAGREEMENT IN ENGLISH AND FRENCH
ASYNCHRONOUS ONLINE DISCUSSION

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PATRICK RODRIGUE BELIBI ENAMA

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ABSTRACT

This paper compares and contrasts the ways online discussion participants of French and English language expression realize common ground, agree and disagree on newspaper blogs on politics. For that purpose, a corpus of 365 replies among which 177 in French and 188 in English were collected from Le Monde.fr and nytimes.com, the world’s two most popular newspaper websites of French and English expression. Kecskes & Zhang’s (2009) socio-cognitive approach was used as theoretical framework to analyze common ground. The findings revealed that pragmatic competence, which was put to use depending on the context of situation, was more widely used than socio-cultural knowledge in the realization of common ground. Also, participants’ cognitive abilities were instrumental in the processes of constructing, maintaining and understanding common ground; Le Monde online discussion participants differed from New York Times participants by using manipulative causality more often, and the inclusive first-person plural pronoun less often. To investigate agreements and disagreements, I used Baym’s (1996) theoretical model applied to computer-mediated communication. The findings revealed participants’ greater inclination to disagreement in online political discussions. Meanwhile, New York Times discussion participants showed a greater propensity for face saving behavior. Also, a recurrent structure for elaborated agreements and disagreements was identified: pre-expansion + dis/agreement + post-expansion. Finally, New York Times online discussion participants produced more complex agreements and disagreements than Le Monde online discussion participants.
DEDICATION

To my family: Enama, Melanie, Bertrand, Eric, Francois, Alain and Arthur, and Lynne Ogren who have always been there whenever I needed them.
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CHAPTER ONE: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Computer-mediated communication has revolutionized the flow of information, patterns of interaction in society, and promoted civil engagement in societal issues. Web logs (blogs), an essential component of the participatory culture resulting from the advent of Web 2.0 technologies, have become the primary tool for political discussion and debate in Western societies. In fact, blogging today provides a stage for those whose voices did not count before, and urges the political elite to bond with commoners, not only in terms of ideas, but also with regard to language use (Janoschka, 2010). Also, blogging is probably the first communicative tool that makes many-to-many patterns of interaction possible, notably through filter blogs based on newspaper articles. From that rich background, blogs are worthy of scientific interest as they can be studied within many disciplines in the social sciences including information science, cognitive psychology, linguistics, political science, cultural anthropology, etc.

In the domain of linguistics, blogs have provided data for research on im/politeness strategies (Park, 2008; Sagaravasi, 2012), politeness and discourse (Landone, 2012), comment structure (Himelboim & McCreery, 2012), agreement and disagreement (Baym, 1996; Bolander, 2012; Chen, Chiu & Wang, 2012), etc. and there is still much ground left for scholars to cover. Interestingly, asynchronous online discussions are of great importance in the fields of cognitive linguistics and pragmatics as they require higher order cognitive abilities from participants; in fact, asynchronous online discussions allow participants time to research information, think critically and put the information in appropriate language form depending on the context, and for specific purposes (Tallent-Runnels et al., 2006). In so doing, online discussion forums
reveal lots of information about the cognitive dispositions of different online communities depending on culture, and notably, language.

Following the linguistic relativity hypothesis or Sapir-Whorf hypothesis which states that different languages affect thought in different ways, this work attempts to show that the culturally patterned cognitions that exist in everyday face-to-face interaction are transferred to a certain extent in computer-mediated communication. Language is viewed here as a tool that activates these culturally patterned cognitions; the grammar and lexicon of a language, for instance, orient speakers to view the world from a particular perspective, and affect the way they mentally represent reality. Therefore, speakers of markedly different languages may develop different mental images to represent and interpret similar objects, ideas or states of affairs in very different ways (see Whorf, 1956) regardless of whether they interact face to face or online.

Cultural psychologists (Shweder, 1991; Markus, Kitayama & Heiman, 1996) argue that there is a cultural meaning system shared by all members of a culture which they use to represent and interpret the world. This cultural meaning system consists of shared values, ideas, knowledge and beliefs, as well as a complex system of interconnected cognitive elements that can activate culturally cognitive processes in patterns specific to that culture (Krauss & Chiu, 1997). Shweder (1991, p. 73) captures the impact of culture on cognition in these words: “cultural traditions and social practices regulate, express and transform the human psyche, resulting less in psychic unity for humankind than in ethnic divergences in mind, self and emotion”. Therefore, though cognitive processes and psychological states are universal—as all normal
human beings are equipped with the same organs to serve functions related to memory, attention, learning, inference, etc—they are also historically grounded, socially and culturally constructed. Markus, Kitayama & Heiman (1996) echo this view when they argue that even basic concepts and principles in psychology such as person, situation, persuasion, knowledge activation and information seeking are “socially constituted” and “culturally variable” (pp. 863-864). Then, politeness, for instance, is constructed differently in written English and French communication, even though the two languages have some common structural characteristics with regard to word order and information structure. In a conversation between French language users, it is common practice for interactants to correct each other language errors whereas in English, it is less common. Also, the level of politeness required in formal French written messages is much higher than that required in English. These cultural differences certainly affect the way speakers agree or disagree with one another, as well as how they co-construct common ground in computer-mediated communication.

Very little research has been carried out so far that explores blog data from different linguistic online communities. This study, a modest contribution in that direction, compares and contrasts pragmalinguistic behavioral patterns of French and English language users with regard to information structure (more specifically common ground), agreement and disagreement in asynchronous online discussions. Unlike the previous studies on blog data mentioned above, this research seeks to contribute to the barely researched area of intercultural comparisons between online communities. In so doing, this study addresses the following questions:
(1) What strategies do English and French language online communities use for agreement and disagreement in political discussion forums?

(2) Are there any differences in the way French and English language users structure their messages in asynchronous online discussions?

(3) How do English and French language users realize common ground in online political discussion forums?

The relevance of this study is twofold: in cognitive linguistic theory, the study contributes to reveal the type of knowledge that French and English language users bring to online asynchronous communicative acts (see Kecskes, 2014). In education, teachers who understand the type of knowledge and ways of structuring information that their students bring to online discussions can help these students develop positive attitudes that might facilitate their online learning experiences.

This paper attempts to reveal what discourse markers and types of grammatical constructions are used in both languages to reveal common ground, agreement and disagreement in online discussion forums. The work is divided into five chapters. Chapter One, the general introduction, presents the background of the study, the aim of the study, research objectives and a plan of the work. In Chapter Two, theoretical perspectives are discussed and previous literature on information structure, agreement and disagreement is reviewed. Chapter Three describes the methods of data collection and analysis while Chapter Four presents results. Finally, Chapter Five discusses the findings, summarizes the main points of the work and suggests areas for future research.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This part discusses the theories that sustain this work and provides a review of related literature on information structure, agreement and disagreement in computer-mediated communication. Kecskes & Zhang’s (2009) socio-cognitive approach to common ground and Baym’s (1996) model of agreement and disagreement in online and offline communication are the theoretical foundations of this work. In this section, previous works on the language used in asynchronous online discussion forums will be discussed.

2.1 Asynchronous online political discussions

Computer-mediated communication (henceforth CMC) occurs in two forms: real time, or synchronous communication, consisting of live chat sessions, and outside-of-real-time or asynchronous communication activities which involve reading and responding to emails sent some time before, taking an online assignment in an online class, etc. According to Bolander (2012, pp. 1608-1609), asynchronous discussions have the following features:

- a time lag between the production and the reception of a message,
- wholeness of the message is as an important feature during production and reception
- nothing indicates on the screen that a recipient is writing a response to a message or post
- There is a link on the main page of the post where readers can access comments by previous readers.
Comments are displayed in chronological order with the newest on the top and closer to the main post or text.

In the domain of CMC, asynchronicity is an essential feature of the blog. Scholars argue that blogs are not easy to define, as definitions range from technical properties of blogs to their output (Herring et al., 2004; Bolander, 2012). The technical properties of blogs are the same features of asynchronicity as discussed above by Bolander. However, looking at output, literature on blogs reveals that there are two main types: the personal/diary blog where an individual posts their thoughts on a subject, and the knowledge or participatory journalism blog where readers are allowed to post comments on news stories.

Another essential feature of blogs is their interactivity (Lomborg, 2009). By posting on the comment section, readers interact with one another as they agree with, contradict or add information to other readers’ comments. Among blog genres, political blogs constitute one of the most prominent, looking at the size of audience and volume of interaction they attract. In fact, an increasing number of people today engage in political discussions online. In so doing, they “become more acquainted with their own opinions, which can result in a stronger political engagement; and they become more aware of oppositional arguments, which can lead to higher tolerance and even trust in those who hold different views” (Gonzalez-Bailon et al., 2010, p. 1). In the United States for example, the percentage of adults who looked online for information during presidential election campaigns rose from 16% in 2000 to 40% in 2008 (Pew report on “The Internet and the 2008 Election”). The corollary of that growth was an increase in online political participation through candidate web sites, blogs, online donations, etc.
with the widespread belief that blogs were “believable, fair, accurate and in-depth” (Johnson & Kaye, 2009, p. 175). From the above, online political discussions create a conversational democracy (Corrado & Firestone, 1996).

This work focuses on newspaper blogs on political topics for two reasons: first, readers of world news on politics very often manifest their agreement or disagreement with both the author of the paper or previous readers by posting comments. Second, in order to convince their potential readers, bloggers write elaborate and structured comments, using specific strategies to express shared knowledge, to agree or disagree with the author or previous readers.

2.2 Information structure and common ground

Information structure (henceforth IS), following Chafe (1976) cited in Krifka (2006), refers to the packaging of information in a sentence in a way to make certain parts of the information more salient than others. Salience here refers to the optimization of the form of the message so that the recipient can get it in the form intended by the sender. Then, it can be said that language users compose their utterances using elements of the context of interaction in order to elicit some desired behavior from their addressees. In that line of thought, Lambrecht (1994) defines IS as

That component of sentence grammar in which propositions as conceptual representations of states of affairs are paired with lexicogrammatical structures in accordance with the mental states of interlocutors who use and interpret these structures as units of information in given discourse contexts (p. 5).
A basic notion that is at the heart of IS is common ground. Following Grice (1989), Stalnaker (2002, p.701) defines common ground (henceforth CG) as the “presumed background information shared by participants in a conversation”. For communication to be successful, interlocutors usually share some body of knowledge that is informed by both the sociocultural and linguistic contexts as well as the immediate context of the interaction. That body of shared knowledge has been referred in the literature under different names including common knowledge, shared knowledge, mutual knowledge and common ground. This means that during communication, the speaker presupposes or assumes that the addressee knows or does not know part of the information he/she wants to convey. In reality, this shared knowledge consists of a set of propositions which interlocutors hold to be true. In that line of thought, Stalnaker (ibid) describes CG as follows:

the common beliefs of the parties to a conversation are the beliefs they share, and that they recognize that they share: a proposition \( \phi \) is common belief of a group of believers if and only if all in the group believe that \( \phi \), all believe that all believe it, all believe that all believe that all believe it, etc. (p. 704).

From the above, CG exits when there is acceptance by interlocutors of common beliefs. Stalnaker (ibid, 716) captures this point in this definition of CG: “It is common ground that \( \phi \) in a group if all members accept (for the purpose of the conversation) that \( \phi \), and all believe that all accept that \( \phi \), and all believe that all believe that all accept that \( \phi \), etc.”
Preceding Stalnaker, Baker et al. (1999, p. 33) claimed that CG includes “mutual understanding, knowledge, beliefs, assumptions, pre-suppositions, and so on”. They also argued that grounding “is the process by which agents augment and maintain such a common ground” (p. 33). Then, CG occurs when interactants are sensitive to one another, watch out what they say, how they say it, and how what they say affects their interlocutors (Mäkitalo et al., 2002). Therefore, there is no CG without feedback, though interactants do not always provide or request feedback all the time.

Difficulties to construct and maintain CG exist at four levels: contact (participants are willing and able to continue the interaction), perception (participants are willing and able to perceive the message), understanding (participants are willing and able to understand the message) and attitudinal reaction (participants are willing and able to respond, react, accept or reject the message) (see Allwood et al. 1992; Baker et al. 1999).

In this work, we assume that interlocutors co-construct knowledge in social encounters depending on the relationships between participants, the topic of conversation, the context and the socio-cultural conventions of appropriate communicative behavior. Therefore, this work follows Kecskes’ (2008) and Kecskes & Zhang’s (2009) socio-cognitive approach which “emphasizes that common ground is a dynamic construct that is mutually constructed by interlocutors throughout the communicative process” (Kecskes & Zhang, 2009, p. 331). The socio-cognitive approach identifies two components of CG: core common ground and emergent common ground. The former refers to the socio-cultural knowledge that members of a speech community have prior to the communicative act whereas the latter refers to the
shared knowledge depending on the actual situational context of the interaction. The socio-cognitive approach goes further than Stalnaker’s shared knowledge; while participants seek and activate core common ground, they are also able to co-construct knowledge in the communicative process (emergent common ground). Stalnaker’s model lacks this second aspect. Therefore, the socio-cognitive approach is relevant to this work from two perspectives: first, it highlights cultural differences among linguistic communities for the expression of CG and second, it shows how members of different linguistic communities co-construct CG during interactions.

The socio-cognitive approach ties in with the view that knowledge is socially constructed, historically grounded and culturally variable. This approach views communication as a product resulting from the interaction of “social beings searching for meaning with individual minds embedded in a socio-cultural collectivity” (Kecskes, 2014, p. 42). Therefore, it can account on those differences in behavior between English and French online communities that are produced as a result of culturally patterned cognitive processes beyond interaction as well as within a particular interaction. Also, in the socio-cognitive approach, communication is characterized by interlocutors’ egocentrism and cooperation. Egocentrism here refers to the fact that interlocutors tend to rely more on prior knowledge during interactions while cooperation is the effort that interlocutors put to make their mutual contributions relevant (Kecskes & Zhang, 2009). Thus, the socio-cognitive approach understands that because of their different socio-cultural backgrounds, French and English language users who engage in online political discussions are likely to seek, construct and activate common ground, agree and disagree with one another in different ways.
Though English and French are typologically close languages in the sense that they are subject-prominent and have a subject-verb-object structure, the type of syntactic structures used in both languages to express CG, the particular circumstances under which these structures are used, the types of discourse moves, social and linguistic resources put into use are likely different.

**Common ground in computer mediated communication**

Baker et al. (ibid) argue that any study of CG in CMC should take into account the different modes of CMC, as different modes of CMC affect conversations in different ways, and will likely result in interactants using different grounding strategies. However, Vandergriff (2006) disagrees; she compared grounding strategies used by 18 learners of German as a second language in face-to-face and synchronous CMC contexts and found that the medium of communication (face-to-face or CMC) has very little impact on grounding.

Ahern et al. (2006) suggested that while the medium of communication supports the process of establishing CG, learners need support from teachers and moderators on how to effectively negotiate meaning in their online activities. Meanwhile, Mäkitalo et al. (2002) and Azavedo et al. (2004) suggested that a group’s ability to establish and maintain CG implies their ability to reach deeper levels of cognitive engagement.

Paulus (2007) studied the emails, discussion forums and chat transcripts of 10 small groups of experienced distance learners using computer mediated discourse analysis in an attempt to find out about participants’ online off-topic activities and how they establish CG in distance learning environments. The findings revealed that the groups discussed such issues as logistics, social and technological concerns instead of
the concepts they were to learn. Also, the findings showed that participants established CG by “being explicitly responsive, responsible and relational” (p. 1). Finally, it was suggested that students remain in the same groups long enough to facilitate their development of grounding strategies.

The above studies prove that there is some literature on the negotiation of CG in CMC, however, literature on the comparison of the negotiation of CG between different online linguistic communities is quite non-existent.

2.3 Disagreement and agreement in online discussion fora

Online political discussions are usually opinion-based and can lead to verbal conflict, as participants express agreement, disagreement or both to assessments made by other participants. In a pioneer study of agreements and disagreements in computer-mediated communication, Baym (1996, p. 14) referred to an agreement as any post which was explicitly responsive to a prior message and which took the same position as that message (though agreements could, and often did, go beyond stating that shared position).

Then, an agreement occurs when there is cooperation and co-construction of knowledge between two or more participants in a conversation, and when these participants successfully interact from the background of a shared socio-cultural knowledge and actual situational context of the interaction. In interactions, agreements are usually preferred actions, probably because of social expectations (see Sacks 1987), even though there are a few context-sensitive situations where agreements are not preferred (see Pomerantz, 1984). In addition to common socio-cultural knowledge and
actual situational context, participants must have similar viewpoints about the topic under discussion. Most agreements incorporate reasoning and elaboration; speakers usually need to show that their assessments take the same position as the previous speaker’s (Pomerantz, ibid; Baym, ibid).

A disagreement, according to Sifianou (2012, p. 1554), is “the expression of a view that differs from that expressed by another speaker”. Sifianou echoes Baym, who, sixteen years earlier, referred to disagreements as those posts which were explicitly responsive to other messages and took positions incompatible with the prior messages. Disagreements were not necessarily directly contradictory, but stated a position which could not logically be held if one held the prior position (p. 14).

The above-mentioned scholars imply that a disagreement presupposes two things: an anterior viewpoint and an explicit response to that specific anterior viewpoint. Baym (ibid) found out that disagreements are “explicitly” related to previous messages through quotation and naming. Also, she shows that disagreements are more elaborated than agreements and contain more mitigation aimed at making the disagreement look non-offensive. Finally, she argues that the medium in CMC does not facilitate categorization of a post as a disagreement.

Disagreements have been mostly perceived as undesired, dispreferred (Pomerantz, 1984; Sacks, 1987) or face-threatening acts (Brown & Levinson, 1987). However, very recent literature (Kakava, 2002; Locher, 2004; Angouri and Tseliga, 2010; Sifianou, 2012) has shown that disagreement could also be positive.
Agreement and disagreement in computer-mediated communication

Baym (1996) studied agreements and disagreements in Usenet discussion groups. Her findings revealed that because of the medium of interaction, the topic under discussion, the context of media use and participant roles, there were differences between agreements and disagreements in oral interaction and in written letters. She also found that the agreements were less often mitigated than the disagreements, and were less likely to contain affirming assertions than disagreements were to contain direct opposing assertions.

Lewis (2005) compared argumentational aspects of asynchronous online political discussion forums employed by English and French language readers of forums provided by Financial Times, Le Monde, The Guardian and Le Nouvel Observateur. Her findings revealed an inclination to topic decay and a “fragmentation of interaction” (p. 1801) in multi-party discourse, and the message structure [reaction] + position + support was identified as recurrent in participants’ messages.

Angouri & Tseliga (2010) investigated “impolite talk” by interactants who deliberately do impoliteness. Based on a corpus of 200 posts collected from interactions marred with disputes involving Greek students and professional academics, the study concludes that impolite disagreements are embedded in the discourse and the social context.

Another study of online behavior in the educational context is that by Chen, Chiu & Wang (2012). They examined whether participants in asynchronous online discussions are affected positively or negatively by the evaluations (agreements, disagreements), knowledge content (new ideas, justifications), or social cues (example
of negative social cue: *You’re completely wrong*) found in prior messages. Their study was based on a corpus of 894 messages by 163 participants on 60 mathematical topics. The findings revealed that recent agreements produced more positive social cues while disagreements produced less positive social cues. Therefore, the characteristics of prior messages influence social cues in subsequent messages. The authors conclude that if students use positive social cues in a judicious manner during disagreements, they will be able to learn from one another and maintain social relationships.

Bolander (2012) investigated agreements and disagreements in personal/diary blogs. Her data was drawn from 08 blogs, for a total of 48 posts that attracted 841 comments from 465 commenters. Her findings revealed that agreements (58%) occurred more often than disagreements (42%), and that interlocutors “make use of a variety of strategies – some more, some less explicit – when disagreeing and agreeing with one another”. Bolander found that there were two main strategies used by interlocutors to agree and disagree with another party, namely quoting (citing part of a previous comment using quotation marks or italics so as to distinguish it from the rest of the response) and naming (referring to a previous commenter by their name). She further stressed that strategies employed by participants to agree or disagree depended on their roles and relationships and to the participation framework. In her conclusion, she claimed that there was a difference between personal/diary blogs and Usenet interactions as found in Baym’s (1996) study at the level of the linguistic construction of responsiveness in agreements and disagreements: agreements and disagreements can be implicitly or explicitly responsive, and not only “explicitly responsive” as suggested by Baym.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methodology used to collect the data. More specifically, it describes the quantitative and qualitative features of the data, how data was coded as agreement, disagreement or neutral, and how CG was identified in the messages. Also, the methods of data analysis are discussed.

3.1 Quantitative and qualitative features of the data

The data used in this study are taken from two websites of two world known periodicals: international.nytimes.com (New York Times) of English expression and Le Monde.fr (Le Monde) of French language expression. Selected discussion forums focused on topics on the world news sections of both newspapers. In order to ensure balance and comparability between French and English online communities, the same topics were selected. These include: the current Syrian crisis, the scandal of the NSA revelations and the Ukrainian EuroMaidan crisis. Before each topic was considered worth providing data, we had to make sure that the topic did generate a minimum of 52 replies to 25 comments from each newspaper. In this work, a comment is a reader’s post after reading an online article; however, this post is not addressed to a previous reader. Meanwhile, a reply is a post in which a reader responds (agrees, disagrees or complements the information provided in the post) to a post made by a previous reader.

The corpus on which I worked comprised a total of 365 replies to 191 comments divided as follows. Data for the Syrian crisis and the NSA scandal were collected from readers’ comments on articles posted on the newspapers’ websites between August 1 and September 30, 2013. From Le Monde, 28 comments for 59 replies were recorded
for the Syrian crisis, while 32 comments for 54 replies were collected for the NSA scandal. Meanwhile, from New York Times, we recorded 33 comments for 63 replies on the Syrian crisis and 32 comments for 62 replies on the NSA scandal.

Data for the Ukrainian crisis were collected from discussion forums on articles posted in January 2014 on Le Monde.fr and nytimes.com. From Le Monde, 34 comments for 64 replies were collected whereas 32 comments for 63 replies were collected from New York Times (henceforth, NYT).

Table 1 below provides a summary of the collected data.

**Table 1: The corpus**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Comments</th>
<th></th>
<th>Replies</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Le Monde</td>
<td>NYT</td>
<td>Le Monde</td>
<td>NYT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syrian crisis</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSA scandal</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukrainian crisis</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>94</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the number of comments per newspaper articles were unequally distributed (NYT had more commenters and more replies), we selected discussion forums that contained at least 10 comments. For the purpose of this study, only comments that were replied were valid; comments on which no one replied were simply discarded. Also, a valid post (comment or reply) was at least five words. Any post with fewer words was
not taken into consideration. Finally, any material in a post that was not in the form of text – for instance pictures, graphics or hyperlinks – was simply ignored.

In this work, a reply was qualified as an agreement when it explicitly took the same position adopted by a previous post while a disagreement was any post that explicitly contradicted a previous post.

3.2 Annotating agreement and disagreement in online discussion forums

After having made the distinction between comments and replies, a very important aspect of the methodology of this work was to classify the 365 total replies as agreements or disagreements or something else. It is necessary to stress here the multi-dimensional levels at which replies operate. Replies can be responsive to the seed post only, to a previous reply to the seed post, to two or more replies to the seed post, or to both the seed post and previous replies. So, replies can be realized in multiple ways.

In this work, I performed a bottom-up analysis of all replies in order to code them as agreements or disagreements. Following the classification method provided by Yin et al. (2012), I relied on four specific features of replies in order to code them:

(a) Lexical features (words): these are adjectives, verbs or adverbs that introduce or express agreement or disagreement. Examples include “no”, “yes”, “really”, “exactly”, “agree”, etc.

(b) Sentiment features: these include descriptive adjectives such as “odd”, “naïve”, “disingenuous”, etc, and thanking words such as “thanks”.

(c) Emotional features: These include question marks, exclamation marks and the use of capital letters to place emphasis.
(d) Durational features: People have a tendency to agree with shorter posts and disagree with longer and very elaborate posts.

To the above-mentioned features, I added a set of phrases that could be used for agreement (example: of course) and disagreement (who cares…). So, in the conversation below, Reply 1 is an example of agreement whereas Reply 2 is a disagreement.

**Cheryl:** However brilliant technically, it's pretty clear that Edward Snowden had no "emotional intelligence," commonsense or political savvy. With all this focus on his hapless wanderings, I wonder still about the contracting out issue, and the why no one from his firm hasn't been brought out as responsible for hiring someone with problems that were hinted at in his resume…

**Ralph:** I fully agree. "Commonsense and political savvy"--n the broadest sense--are often integral products of a liberal education. Brilliant technical skills and quickness are no substitute for that.

Snowden's broken and irregular educational background, his geekish narrowness and preoccupation with e-games and e-toys, his reported asocial awkwardness should have given someone in the business of handing out security-sensitive clearances some cause for a closer look.

**Remember America:** Pretty clear from what? The video and subsequent interviews show him to be not merely technically brilliant but exceptionally thoughtful and well-spoken. His "hapless wanderings" have evaded the most powerful nation in the world. As for his resumé, what problems would yours tell us, if we were to view it
with malice aforethought? Using the same pitiless, armchair psychology, have you ever asked yourself which side, during the Revolutionary War, you would have been on?

The above interaction shows that both Ralph and Remember America respond to Cheryl. While Ralph agrees by using the discourse move “I fully agree”, then elaborating his position, Remember America disagrees; s/he opens their post with a question, then, negates the facts presented in the seed post and closes the reply with two more questions. The number of questions (three) clearly indicates that the reply is a disagreement.

3.3 Annotating CG in online discussion forums

As said earlier, this work adopts the socio-cognitive approach of CG developed by Kecskes & Zhang (2009). According to Kecskes (2014), “in the socio-cognitive paradigm, human functioning is viewed as the product of a dynamic interplay of personal, behavioral and environmental influences”. For the study of this human functioning, we take feedback as pre-requisite for CG; then, feedback can be analyzed into elements of the context, notably sociocultural knowledge and actual situational knowledge. Within socio-cultural knowledge or core common ground, we look at the projected general knowledge of cultural norms (customs, laws, and ethics), values, beliefs and the participants’ level of proficiency in the language of interaction. For instance, knowledge of laws or acronyms is socially constructed, and makes sense to those who share the same linguistic code, cultural norms and values. Looking at the knowledge derived from the context of situation or emergent common ground, we study linguistic elements of the interaction that make sense only within the particular context of the co-construction of the message (responsiveness). Studying responsiveness allows
us to look at how elements of messages such as quotes, conjunctions, naming, pronouns, etc. are used to create CG. Also, we look at how two cognitive operations, namely forward causal inference and reverse causal questions are used to establish CG.

3.4 Data analysis methods

This study requires an approach that analyzes the expression of common ground, agreement and disagreement not only in terms of characteristics and distinctive features, but also in terms of frequencies of those characteristics and distinctive features. Therefore, this research consists of both qualitative and quantitative methods. According to Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004), the goal of mixed-method research “is not to replace either of these approaches but rather to draw from the strengths and minimize the weakness of both (quantitative and qualitative) in single research studies and across studies”. Studying the frequencies of occurrence of distinctive features of common ground, agreement and disagreement in English and French online discussion certainly sheds more light on the study of human behavior from different online linguistic communities.
CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

This chapter presents the analysis of collected data. Quantitative data are presented in tables and figures while qualitative data are presented with examples.

4.1 Frequency of agreements and disagreements in French and English online discussion forums

Posts on political discussion forums can be classified in three categories: agreement, disagreement and neutral. The analysis of collected data shows that no significant difference was found between Le Monde.fr and NYT discussion participants with regard to the frequencies of agreement and disagreement in online political discussion forums. As stated in the review of literature, an agreement is a post that takes the same position with a previous post, whereas a disagreement is a post that either contradicts a previous post or, cannot be assumed by someone holding the view expressed in the previous post. Neutral refers to a post that is neither a disagreement nor an agreement; it can be a response to a question asked by a previous reader or a post that contains information not related to the topic at hand. Frequencies of these 3 categories are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Entry types: agreements and disagreements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Le Monde (N=177)</th>
<th>New York Times (N=188)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agreement</td>
<td>31 (17.51%)</td>
<td>32 (17.02%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagreement</td>
<td>117 (66.1%)</td>
<td>122 (64.89%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral and other</td>
<td>29 (16.38%)</td>
<td>34 (18.08%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>177 (100%)</td>
<td>188 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As the above table indicates, at least 64% of the posts collected from Le Monde.fr and NYT online political discussion forums are disagreements while at least 17% of posts agree with previous posts or comments. Also, the table shows that differences of frequencies of agreement and disagreement between English and French online communities are minimal.

4.2 Strategies of disagreements and agreements in French and English online discussions

Participants in online political discussion forums use various strategies to agree and disagree with one another. Strategies used for agreement include words and phrases, and the expression of gratitude. Meanwhile, strategies for disagreement include words and phrases, negation, sarcasm and attack. The only notable difference here is that Le Monde.fr discussion participants, in addition to the aforementioned four disagreement strategies, also use closing salutations and imposed ends of discussions to disagree with one another.

4.2.1 Strategies of agreement in French and English online discussion forums

Participants in Le Monde.fr and NYT discussion forums showed agreement with previous posts through explicit agreement words and phrases, and the expression of gratitude. The expression of gratitude was significantly more used in English posts than in French posts.

Explicit agreement words used by Le Monde discussion forum participants include oui (yes in English), OK (OK), naturellement (of course in English), parfait (perfect in English), effectivement (indeed in English) and justement (exactly in English), whereas NYT discussion forum participants used exactly, sure, yes and ya.
Explicit agreement phrases found in Le Monde data include d’accord (Okay), tout à fait d’accord (yes, absolutely), même reaction que vous (I had the same thought), en effet (indeed), et oui (oh yes), c’est tout à fait cela (absolutely), je vous rejoins (I join you on this), il est vrai que… (it is true that..), vous avez certainement raison (you’re probably right), enfin quelqu’un qui expose la vérité (finally someone that reveals the truth). Meanwhile, the following agreement phrases were used by NYT online discussion forum participants: of course; hit the nail on the right [s]pot; excellent comment; this is true; you hit it on the head; excellent idea; I agree; sure enough; I fully agree; excellent point; completely agree; I will second that motion.

The analysis of data further reveals that the most used agreement words or phrases include tout à fait d’accord, en effet, effectivement, and oui in French, whereas of course, I (fully) agree, exactly and excellent point were more used in English.

The expression of gratitude, another agreement strategy, was used by late participants in discussion forums to thank early participants who expressed points of view similar to those they held. Though gratitude was not as common as explicit agreement words and phrases, it was used in 22.2 % of agreement posts in French and in 29.41% in agreement posts in English.

**4.2.2 Disagreement strategies in English and French online discussion forums**

Explicit disagreement words and phrases, negation, sarcasm and attack were used by French and English online discussion forum participants to disagree with previous posts. In addition to the above-mentioned strategies, Le Monde.fr online discussion participants sometimes used closing salutations, and imposed an end to a discussion with someone holding an opposite point of view to theirs.
Explicit disagreement words and phrases

Many authors opened their posts with words or phrases that explicitly showed their disagreement with previous posts. Among words, *mais* (but), *non* (no), *malheureusement* (it is unfortunate that) and *nan* (nope) were used in French while *no*, *please*, *actually*, *so*, *well*, *counterexample*, *sorry* and *seriously* were used in English. As for phrases, the following were used by French language forum participants: *du grand n’importe quoi* (big nonsense), *ce que vous dites est faux* (You are wrong on this), *c’est plutôt* (rather…), *il semble plutôt que*…(it rather looks like…), *désolé de vous contredire* (sorry to disagree), *curieux raisonnement* (that’s a curious argument), *vous avez du mal* (you feel the pain), *vous prétendez que*…(you pretend that…), *vos informations datent un peu* (your information is quite outdated), *c’est un pseudo motif* (that is a pseudo reason), *sûrement pas* (certainly not), *nous n’avons pas la même conception de*…(we do not share the same view about…), *c’est faux* (that’s not true), *pas du tout* (not at all), *au contraire* (on the contrary), *vous croyez vraiment que…?* (Do you really believe that..?), *votre comparaison est totalement déplacée* (your comparison is totally over the line), *je suis désolé mais*…(I’m sorry but), *grande différence entre les deux cas…* (there is a huge difference here), *vous pensez que…?* (Do you really think that…?).

Meanwhile, participants in NYT discussion forums opened their posts with the following disagreement phrases: *you are pretty smug in your assessment*; *how about…?*; *the probability that …is zero*; *you are wrong*; *you have it completely wrong*; *give me/us a break*; *your remark is contemptible*; *let’s talk again when…*; *you have no clue*; *you have no grasp of…*; *I guess you [are] stuck in times*; *your argument is based*
on false premises; you can't be serious; slow down; how does ...?; how, exactly, is he doing that?; I don’t care what X or Y thinks; perhaps you missed the fact that...; these are fact free assertions; actually, you got it wrong; your argument is extremely disingenuous; you have no idea; I don’t buy it; who cares...?; you are wrong and missed the point; who told you that...?; I would rather have...; who are you kidding?; that is irrelevant to the matter.

Also of relevance is how participants in discussion forums closed their disagreements. Some participants closed their posts with directives addressed to previous post authors they disagreed with. Examples of directives in the French language corpus include renseignez-vous un peu (Do a little fact-checking); Evitons les lectures binaires (let’s avoid binary readings); ne simplifiez pas une situation très compliquée (Do not oversimplify a complex situation); informez-vous (Get informed).

Directives used by English language discussion forum participants include face the fact that...; take a deep breath and let it go; wake up and smell the coffee; please, get real about...; perhaps you ought to re-examine your imagination; so my advice is research the subject well...

In French, two other strategies were used to close disagreements; these are closing salutations (bien à vous—best regards in English) and imposed-end-of – discussion phrases (point final, point barre—end of discussion in English) which are used by speakers to impose an end to a discussion with other speakers.

**Example of a closing salutation in a disagreement:**

**Bof:** [...] ce n’est pas manifester pacifiquement que de prendre de force des batiements administratifs. En outre les ultra nationalistes ukrainiens sont bien l’une des
composantes de ces mouvements. Bref, il y a des neo-fasco qui semblent chercher la guerre civile. ([…] To seize government buildings through the use of force is nothing like a pacific protest. Furthermore, Ukrainian ultra nationalists are among the protesters. In short, those neo-fascists might want a civil war.)

Sanchaudponzo: ma famille habite Kiev…ce ne sont ni des fascos, ni des ultras ni des gens qui appartiennent a la caste du pouvoir…donc pardonnez-moi si je ne crois pas à une seule de vos diatribes et celles de vos camarades! Bien a vous. (my family lives in Kiev…they are neither fascists nor ultra nationalists, nor belong to the caste in power…so forgive me if I do not believe in the diatribes from you and your pals. Best regards!)

An example of an imposed end of discussion

Thierry: Le 4ème amendement Américain doit être amendé pour ne pas différencier le peuple américain des autres peuples. La vie privée de tous doit restée protégée […]
Amis américains ne tolérez pas chez nous ce que vous condamnez chez vous … (The 4th amendment of the U.S. constitution should be modified in order to avoid discrimination between American people and others in the world. Everyone’s private life must be protected […] American friends, do not tolerate what is happening here which you condemn in your country …)

A. de Tocqueville: C’est bien en cela que l’article, et votre reaction, sont surréalistes. La constitution et le droit americain ne peuvent evidemment que traiter de leur realités interieures. Reste aux pays visés par la NSA a mettre en place un arsenal legislatif pour se défendre. Point final. (That’s where the article and your opinion are surreal. The
U.S. constitution and the U.S. law can only deal with their internal affairs. It is up to the countries targeted by the NSA to put in place an arsenal of laws to defend themselves. End of discussion!).

Negation

Negation, according to Cowan (2008), is “the process of forming negative sentences, as opposed to sentences that are affirmative” (p. 88). Negation can be used to deny evidence, reject an idea or a proposition, or refuse an offer. In our corpus, negation is widely used to express disagreement with previous posts. In Le Monde corpus, negation is expressed with the negators ne/n’...pas (not in English), non plus (neither) and ni...ni (neither…nor), whereas in NYT, it is done with the negative particle not and negative words such as no, nothing, nobody, anything.

Sarcasm

Sarcasm refers to verbal irony used to criticize or mock people over their ideas or actions. It is different from humor in that the individual expressing sarcasm generally exhibits an inherently negative attitude toward the person or event s/he mocks or criticizes (Kreuz & Glucksberg, 1989; Lee & Katz, 1998). In this study, both French and English language online discussion forum participants use sarcasm as a disagreement strategy with other participants. However, frequencies of use are different from one language community to the other. In fact, sarcasm accounts for 19.65% of all disagreements in the French language corpus whereas it represents only 03.27% of all disagreements in the English language corpus. This shows that French language users tend to be more sarcastic than their English language counterparts in online political
discussion forums. Le Monde online discussion participants used these phrases in their sarcastic posts: *vous voulez rire* (you must be joking); *spectaculaire raisonnement* (spectacular argument); *faîtes de beaux rêves, monsieur* (sweet dreams, sir); *quelle rhétorique, j’en suis bluffé* (what a speech, I am very impressed); *encore un qui vit au pays des bisounours* (And one more who lives in cloud-cuckoo-land; *il est toujours permis de se raconter des contes de fée* (everyone can always tell fairy tales!).

**An example of sarcasm by a French language user**

**James:** Je ne comprends pas l’aversion des citoyens envers ceux qui suent nuit et jour pour les protéger, souvent au peril de leur vie. Oui, vous êtes surveillé, mais c’est pour votre bien… (*I do not understand people’s anger toward those who toil day and night to protect them, to the detriment of their own lives. Yes, you are being watched, but it is for your own good…*)

**Herve:** […] Encore un qui vit au pays des bisounours. On vous espionne pour votre bien, on restreint les libertés mais c’est pour votre bien… Vous, vous êtes bien conditionné, chapeau bas, vous avez la médaille d’or… (*[…] And one more who lives in cloud-cuckoo-land. You are being spied upon for your own good, your freedoms are restricted for your own good…You’ve been well-conditioned, hands off, you get the gold medal…*)

As for the NYT, sarcasm was introduced by the words *well* or *really*. An example includes:

**Mistr:** The photograph says it all. May God protect the people.
Tim: Well, God’s track record in the Ukraine, at least the last 100 years is not that good. Several famines, civil war, Nazi invasion, Hitler, Stalin…

Attack

Attack here refers to a verbal provocation, such as when a respondent insults, scorns or disrespects a previous author in his post. In our data, there were very few cases of attacks including 04 (03.41%) in Le Monde disagreement posts and only 01 (0.81%) in NYT disagreement posts.

4.2.3 Mitigated agreements and mitigated disagreements

Participants in online discussion forums sometimes agreed or disagreed with their recipients while acknowledging positions held by these participants. The analysis of collected data shows that there were more cases of mitigated agreements than mitigated disagreements regardless of the language used by speakers. Figure 1 below shows frequencies of mitigated agreements and mitigated disagreements from the collected data.

Figure 1: Mitigated agreements and mitigated disagreements
As the above figure shows, NYT online discussion forum participants tend to mitigate their agreements more than Le Monde.fr discussion participants. Meanwhile, there are negligible differences in the frequencies of mitigated disagreements between Le Monde.fr discussion forum participants and NYT discussion participants.

4.3 The internal structure of agreements and disagreements

A striking feature in the collected data is the length of posts. In online discussion forums, English language posts were significantly much longer than French language posts. Also, agreements were significantly shorter than disagreements, a finding that corroborates those of previous studies including Yin et al. (2012). The majority of posts opened with either an agreement or disagreement phrase, or a concessive structure. Concessive structures are mitigated; they join agreement and disagreement structures in the same clause.

4.3.1 The internal structure of agreements

Most agreements, regardless of language, comprised an agreement phrase + elaboration that support the position of the writer and that espouse the position of the author of a previous post. In the French data, it was possible to have a variant of that form: Naming + agreement + elaboration and two other structures: agreement phrase + claim + evidence, and quote + +1.

Example of agreement phrase + elaboration structure

Le citoyen: Tout à fait d’accord! Depuis des années, la France ne comprend rien aux pays arabes. Quant à la Syrie laissons agir les russes qui n’ont aucune envie de voir les Djihadistes à Damas, …(Yes, absolutely! For many years, France does not understand Arab countries. About Syria, we should let the Russians take the lead as they do not
want to see Jihadists in Damascus...). In the example above, tout à fait d’accord is the agreement phrase while the rest of the post is the elaboration. Often, the elaboration consists of new information supporting the point of view held by both the author of the new post and the author of a previous post as is the case in the example above. Sometimes, an elaboration is a paraphrase or a mere repetition of an elaboration made by a previous post author.

**Example of agreement phrase + claim + evidence**

Marvel: tout à fait d’accord. Le gouvernement ukrainien est issu des urnes, il a été élu par une majorité d’ukrainiens. La minorité qui manifeste à Kiev de façon de plus en plus violente et irresponsable est un assemblage hétéroclite de fac[é]tieux, regroupant des extremistes nationalistes de droite…(Yes, absolutely! The Ukrainian government was elected; it was elected by the majority of Ukrainians. The minority that protests in Kyev is becoming increasingly violent and irresponsible; it is a heteroclite group composed of national extremists of the right…).

In the English language data, the following structures clearly stand out: agreement phrase + elaboration; agreement phrase + quote + elaboration; agreement phrase + claim + expression of gratitude; agreement phrase + name + elaboration; agreement phrase + claim + good wish; agreement phrase + indirect questions.

**Example of agreement phrase + quote + elaboration**

Ralph: I fully agree. "Commonsense and political savvy"--n the broadest sense--are often integral products of a liberal education. Brilliant technical skills and quickness are no substitute for that. […]
Example of agreement phrase + claim + good wish

Steve: Completely agree. His wealth is based on his power and he will stop at nothing to keep it. Keep safe, my friend.

From the above, it can be said that agreements in NYT online discussion data are more complex than those found in Le Monde.fr online discussion data. Remarkably, we are able to come up with the following theory of the structure of agreements: pre-expansion + agreement + post-expansion; the pre-expansion is a preface (either a name, an agreement marker or both), the agreement is the claim, evidence, examples or details that show the position of the author, while the post-expansion is a closing (which could be a good wish, an expression of gratitude, etc.). However, many agreement posts could consist only of the pre-expansion, the agreement itself or both.

4.3.2 The internal structure of disagreements

The analysis of data revealed that the length of posts significantly affected the structure of disagreements. In fact, disagreements done by NYT online discussion participants, because of their length, were more complex than those done by Le Monde.fr discussion participants. However, it was found that the structure of disagreements in free online discussions varies very often. In the Le Monde.fr data, the following structures were identified: disagreement phrase + correction; denial + correction; paraphrase + correction; disagreement phrase + elaboration; denial claim + disagreement phrase; disagreement phrase + counterexample; naming + disagreement phrase + elaboration; sarcastic sentence; a series of questions; quote + correction; naming + claim + evidence; questions + statements; interro-negative phrase + sarcasm;
denial + counterargument; questions + statements; naming + counterargument;
counterexample + correction; sarcasm + naming; quote + denial + counterargument;
naming + questions; counterargument + example; naming + directive + politeness +
evidence; question + evidence + question.

Example of denial + correction structure

**Marie-Chantale**: Il ne s’agit pas de l’entrée de l’Ukraine dans l’UE mais d’un accord
de partenariat. Et plus si affinités, mais on n’en est pas encore là, loin de là…(*It is not
about Ukraine joining the UE, but an agreement for partnership. And if there are any
affinities, we are not yet there, far from it…*)

In the English language corpus, the structures of disagreements were as follows:
denial + correction; denial + correction + counterargument; quote + questions; single
question; quote + really?; question + counterclaim + questions; claim + elaboration;
denial + elaboration; disagreement phrase + elaboration; counterargument + denial;
counterargument + example; name + question + counterexamples + directive; so
statement + questions; salutation + disagreement phrase + counterargument; quote +
counterargument + quote; name + directive + question; name + gratitude + claim;
disagreement phrase + claim + evidence; question + claim + evidence; name +
counterexamples; if question + if statement; counterexamples + advice; question +
negation + correction; sarcastic question + directive; politeness + name +
counterargument; concessive structure + counterargument; polite request +
counterevidence + correction; disagreement phrase + sarcasm; polite request +
counterevidence + correction; sarcasm + directive.

Example of name + question + counterexample + directive structure
Scott: Stu--And how do you think you will ever learn all of the evil things the government/private contractors do with your PRIVATE information? We are barred from even reading FISA orders, or any other information about the spying programs. There were millions of Germans who did not believe Jews were being exterminated until they were forced to view the bodies after Hitler was defeated. Denial is a dangerous thing and allows the government to run roughshod over our civil liberties. Wake up and smell the coffee!

In the above example, Stu, the name of the addressee of this post, is directly followed by a question. Then there are two counterexamples including not being allowed to read FISA orders and the Hitler example. Finally, comes the closing directive “wake up and smell the coffee”.

Finally, the analysis of disagreements also revealed a recursive structure for elaborated disagreements, which is similar to the one outlined for agreements. This structure is: pre-expansion (name +/- or disagreement marker) + disagreement (denial /claims /counterclaims /quote/ paraphrase + elaboration/ correction /counterevidence /counterexamples /questions).

4.4 Common ground in asynchronous online discussions

Because asynchronous web-based discussions are highly text-dependent, many of the non-verbal (prosodic) features of CG found in face-to-face and oral communication are not found in CMC. However, there are lexical and grammatical features that account for the realization of common ground, either in the context of shared socio-cultural knowledge (core common ground) or situational knowledge (emergent common ground). In this study, no significant difference was found in the
way French and English language online communities construct CG through shared socio-cultural knowledge. However, it was found that French language online discussion participants used the inclusive pronouns “we/us” significantly less often than their English language counterparts as a responsiveness strategy. Also, forward causal inference and reverse causal questions, two grounding strategies whereby a listener/recipient overtly indicates their current state of understanding by asking a question using given information (Vandergriff, 2006, p. 114), were widely used by participants in online discussions.

4.4.1 Constructing CG through shared socio-cultural knowledge

One major finding here is that shared socio-cultural knowledge in French and English is more acknowledged in agreements than in disagreements. As such, common ground is realized in French to agree with other participants through the following words and phrases: oui (yes in English), OK (OK), naturellement (of course in English), parfait (perfect in English), effectivement (indeed in English) and justement (exactly in English), d’accord (Okay), tout à fait d’accord (yes, absolutely), même reaction que vous (I had the same thought), en effet (indeed), et oui (oh yes), c’est tout à fait cela (absolutely), je vous rejoins (I join you on this), il est vrai que…(it is true that..), vous avez certainement raison (you’re probably right), enfin quelqu’un qui expose la vérité (finally someone that reveals the truth). The use of explicit agreement markers suggests that participants accept what was said wholly; they have the same interpretations, judgments and emotions regarding the participants’ elaboration of their position toward the topic. This implies that they share the same socio-cultural knowledge in relation to the topic.
Some of these words and expressions are also used to acknowledge the position held by a participant, and do not necessarily imply agreement. This is the case in mitigated disagreements as shown in the exchange below:

**Bruno:** Sur les 110 000 morts, il y a 45 000 victimes parmi les forces gouvernementales (chiffres fournis par l’OSDH…)…Mais on se garde bien de citer les chiffres lorsqu’on veut diaboliser le régime syrien…(*Out of the 110,000 deaths, 45,000 victims are government forces, according to figures by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights …However, people tend to avoid using those figures when they want to diabolize the Syrian regime…*)

**Renaud:** *D’accord* pour considerer les vrais chiffres (s’il y en a). […] Si l’on separe les militaires des civils, quels sont les chiffres? Pourquoi tenez-vous tant à Bachar…? (*OK, let’s consider the real figures—if there are any. If we take out military from civilian victims, what are the numbers? Why do you care so much about Bachar…?*)

In the above exchange, *d’accord* is used by Renaud to acknowledge the point made by Samosate on figures. A typical case of shared socio-cultural knowledge occurs when Renaud does not request clarification about the abbreviation (OSDH), probably because s/he knows what that means, since both participants share the same socio-cultural background knowledge; lack of CG in this case would have prompted Renaud to request for clarification, or make a hypothesis or a forward inference.

In the English language corpus, common ground realization is also much stronger with explicit agreements, notably through the use of agreement words and phrases listed below: *of course; hit the nail on the right [s]pot; excellent comment; this is true; you
hit it on the head; excellent idea; I agree; sure enough; I fully agree; excellent point;
completely agree; I will second that motion.

The exchange below shows realization of common ground through shared
socio-cultural background knowledge.

**Excellency**: It is unseemly of NY Times writers to suggest that Snowden should come
back to the USA and face a "fair" trial. Do we readers really look that stupid to you?
Why not try him in absentia - you don’t actually need him here in today's electronic
information environment. You could demonstrate your fairness to us.

**Mitchell**: Excellent idea! And because the Supreme Court has original jurisdiction in
the matter the case can be tried at that level rather than through the appellate process.
Let us know right now if we are to be a free people governed by the Constitution or
subjects of the state.

By using the agreement phrase “excellent idea”, Mitchell agrees with
Excellency’s suggestion to try Snowden in absentia. S/he shows that there is common
ground with Excellency by using legal evidence from the socio-cultural background
knowledge that the two interlocutors seemingly share.

**4.4.2 Constructing CG through the context of situation**

In order to fully account for how participants in online political discussion
forums construct and maintain CG, we first of all assessed responsiveness, i.e. “the way
disagreements and agreements are tied to previous claims to which they are
responding” (Bolander, 2012, p. 1615), as it helps to understand how CG is realized
with a minimal knowledge of the socio-cultural context.
In asynchronous online discussion forums, agreements and disagreements relate to previous posts in various ways. Table 3 below shows different types of responsiveness strategies and their frequencies of occurrence in the data.

**Table 3: Responsiveness in online political discussion forums**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>Le Monde</strong> (N=177)</th>
<th><strong>New York Times</strong> (N=188)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Occurrences</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naming</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>20.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quoting</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>06.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraphrasing</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>02.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronoun</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>53.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conjunction</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>06.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrative</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table shows that there are four major ways in which both French and English language online communities relate to previous posts in online discussions. These include personal pronouns, naming, quoting and conjunctions.

Personal pronouns are widely used by readers to directly address authors of previous posts or to highlight one’s point of view or personal experience in relation to the topic of discussion. The analysis of personal pronouns in the data reveals that three pronouns and their derivative forms are widely used in both languages. These include *vous/votre* (71%), *je/mon/ma* (16%) and *nous/notre* (13%) in the French language data and *you/your* (57%), *I/my* (22%) and *we/us/our* (21%) in the English language data.

The above pronouns are exactly the same in both languages, but their frequencies of use
differ from one language to another. One notable finding, for instance, is that French language users tend to use the pronoun “vous” (you) to address a previous author far more often than English language users utilize “you” for the same purpose. Meanwhile, French language users tend to utilize the pronoun “nous” (we) less often than English language users do with its equivalent “we”.

Naming is the second most used strategy to relate to authors of previous posts. Naming occurs when the author of a post explicitly names the author of a previous post to signify that he/she addresses that particular author. In this study, naming occurs in 20.9% of posts in the French language data while it occurs only in 16.48% of English language posts. This clearly indicates that French language users tend to name previous authors more often than English language users do. Also, naming was mainly used in disagreement posts. For instance, in Le Monde discussion forums, 29 (78.37%) posts that referred to previous participants were disagreements, while only 02 (05.40%) were agreements and 06 (12.21%) were neither agreements nor disagreements. Meanwhile, in NYT discussion forums, 22 (70.96%) posts which addressed specific participants by their names were disagreements, against 08 (25.8%) for agreements and 01 (03.22%) neutral. These results show that Le Monde online discussion forum participants tend to name other participants they disagree with more often than their NYT counterparts. Meanwhile, NYT online discussion forum participants tend to name participants who agree with them more often than their counterparts of Le Monde do.

Quoting refers to citing verbatim what another person said. Our data reveals that quoting was used more often in English language posts (09.04%) than French language posts (06.77%).
Conjunctions are linking words that join two ideas in the same sentence. The analysis of collected data reveals that conjunctions were used by participants in online discussion forums to relate their posts to previous posts as shown in the examples below.

**Example from Le Monde:**

**Bon Sens:** Juste pour info: en 1970 les USA ont utilisé du gaz au Laos... Mais ça personne n'en parle.. La guerre c'est la guerre.. *(Just for your information: in 1970 the U.S. used gas in Laos...But no one talks about this...War is war.)*

**Simon:** *et* ils ont aussi massacré les peaux-rouges... mais je ne sache pas que ça éclaire le problème actuel de bombarder ou non Assad. *(and they also massacred the red skins (“peaux rouges”, literally translated as red skins, refers to Native Americans)...but I am not certain that this clarifies the issue at hand of whether to bomb Assad or not.)*

**Example from NYT:**

**Virginia:** Of course of singular interest here, is America’s vast arsenal of chemical weapons.

**ACW:** *Which* we are destroying. Over 90% of the original has already been destroyed and the rest are in the pipeline. Calling it an “arsenal” is incorrect.

In the above examples, replies make sense only because they relate to seed posts; they do not have the structure of basic sentences in French or English, yet they make sense. They begin with conjunctions and fit into the structures of seed posts.
In the collected data, conjunctions were used as a responsive strategy in 06.21% of posts in Le Monde discussion forums, whereas they were used in 09.04% of posts in NYT. The most used conjunctions were *si* (*if* in English) and *et* (*and* in English) in the French data while *if* and *and* were also the most used in the English language data.

Participants in asynchronous online discussions tend to construct and maintain CG more often through the context of situation than through socio-cultural background knowledge. The analysis of collected data reveals that CG was realized exclusively through the context of situation in at least 67% of agreements in French and 66% of agreements in English. Meanwhile, in cases where the socio-cultural background knowledge was the determining factor of the realization of CG, the context of situation still helped in consolidating understanding among participants involved in the discussion. The examples below illustrate the above findings.

**Le Monde.fr example**

**Michel:** Il y a une chose sur laquelle je ne vois aucune explication. Je suppose que les communications des chefs d’état sont censés être sécurisées par les services secrets concernés. Si c'est le cas, pourquoi peut-on les pirater? (*There is one thing on which I have no explanation. I suppose communications of country leaders must be secured by the ad hoc secret services. If that’s the case, how can one spy on them?*)

**Gilles:** Je ne suis pas spécialiste mais je pense que la sécurisation ne peut se faire que si les deux cotés de l'échange sont sécurisés. Si un chef d'état échange par téléphone avec un tiers non sécurisé, je ne vois pas bien comment l'échange pourrait être sécurisé. (*I am no specialist but I think security of telephone communications cannot be achieved*
without securing both ends of the communication process. If a head of state phones a non-secured party, I don’t see how the communication can be secured).

Michel: Pour Gilles: OK mais comment se fait-il que le chef d'état s’autorise - ou est autorisé - à avoir des conversations de chef d’état- donc pas pour parler du temps qu’il fait- non sécurisées? MD (For Gilles: OK, but how come a head of state makes non-secured calls, or is allowed to make such calls knowing that he would discuss state matters and not talk about today’s weather?)

From the above exchange, it can be said that both participants (Michel and Gilles) are all aware that heads of states’ phone conversations must be secured. That represents the shared background knowledge between the two participants in the exchange. However, the topic of discussion—the scandal of the NSA spying on citizens and leaders of allied countries—provides an immediate context which helps to build and maintain mutual understanding. This is exemplified by the use of OK by Gilles as an acknowledgement of Michel’s idea, but also by the very fact that Michel followed up and responded to Gilles’ post.

The New York Times example below is a typical case of emergent common ground:

Alan: Now how does getting accountability into the equation work? The mass murderer is still in control, still committing crimes against humanity.

ZTedster: Attacking Syria will not make us richer, more powerful, or safer. Take a deep breath and let it go.
The above example, though a disagreement, shows that ZTedster understands well what Alan means by “accountability”. In this context—which is embedded in the broader context of the Syrian crisis with its 120,000 human casualties—Alan clearly suggests punishing the Assad regime in Syria for the “crimes against humanity”. ZTedster’s response shows that there is some common understanding of the horror in Syria, despite differences on how to achieve accountability for crimes.

Also, deixis—words and phrases that can only be understood from the spatio-temporal context of the utterance (Lyons, 1977; Levinson, 1983)—are used to maintain CG between participants in the discussion. In fact, pronouns, one of the responsiveness strategies listed above, are used to point forward inside the text (cataphora), backward inside the text (anaphora) and out of the text (exophora). For instance, in the last example of French language interaction between Gilles and Michel, the first use of the third person singular pronoun *il* is an example of exophoric reference since it is used here as a dummy subject (therefore, *it* in English), while the second *il* is an example of anaphoric reference as it points backward to the word *chef d’etat* (in this case, *il* refers to *he* in English). In the same way, the definite article *the* in NYT Alan’s example “the mass murderer” is an example of exophoric reference which ZTedster is able to understand as referring to Bachar Al Assad.

Finally, lexical cohesion also helps to maintain CG. Lexical cohesion, according to Halliday (1994, p. 274), refers to “the cohesive effect achieved by the selection of vocabulary.” It can be assumed that such selection of vocabulary aims at achieving textual continuity, therefore contributes to maintain CG. Lexical cohesion is done through reiteration (synonyms, repetitions and hyperonyms) of lexical items and
collocation. For instance, “the mass murderer” in NYT Alan’s post is an example of reiteration that refers to Assad.

From the above, most participants in online discussions do not need a vast knowledge of the socio-cultural or political factors related to a problem before expressing their opinions on world politics topics. The context of situation allows participants to co-construct and maintain CG.

4.4.3 Forward causal inference and reverse causal questions

There are two major findings here: first, reverse causal questions were more used than forward causal inference as grounding strategy. Second, Le Monde.fr online discussion participants used reverse causal questions almost twice as much as NYT online discussion participants did. However, they used forward causal inference twice as less as NYT online discussion participants. The figure below shows frequencies of forward causal inference and reverse causal questions as grounding strategies in the collected data.

Figure 2: Forward causal inference and reverse causal questions in online discussion forums in %
It can be seen from the above figure that reverse causal questions are used more often than forward causal inference by online discussion participants as strategies to construct and maintain CG. However, while NYT discussion participants used forward causal inference more often than Le Monde.fr discussion participants, they used reverse causal questions less often than their counterparts.

Forward causal inference occurs when a listener or recipient asks a question or makes a statement based on given information to indicate his/her state of understanding. This reception strategy is used by online discussion forum participants for purposes of counterfactual reasoning, or, to put it simply, to disagree with one another. In most cases, forward causal inference, according to Gelman (2011), is used to estimate the “causes and effects” of something. Here, questions that are asked are of the type what if…For instance, what is the effect of smoking on health? Or what is the effect of campaigns on elections outcomes? Forward causal reasoning statements, which are more found in our data than forward causal questions, are statements of the type if….then.

**Example of forward causal inference in Le Monde.fr data**

*Tocqueville:* Pauvres millions atteints dans leur intimité, qu’ils sont trop heureux de déverser par ailleurs sur les reseaux sociaux. Nous voila à nous rappeler que nous sommes censés protéger notre vie privée…*(Poor millions of people whose privacy is being violated, while they enjoy exposing themselves in social networks…Here we are reminding ourselves that we should protect our private lives…)*

*Tete de Cochon:* […] si un groupe d’individus stockent nos données dans la perspective annoncée de détecter les terroristes, fasse le ciel, que d’autres moyens de
Example of forward causal inference in NYT

**Judy:** They had elections. Yanukovich was elected. In a civilized country you don’t change[d] government by a mob on the street looting and burning. […] They need to be civilized and wait for the next elections.

**Marc:** If a government passes laws to crush dissent what is the point of waiting for the next election?

In the two examples in French and English above, the reply is a forward causal inference which states a possible cause and its hypothetical effect.

Reverse causal questions

Reverse causal questions also indicate a speaker’s state of understanding of a particular situation. Unlike forward causal questions and statements that provide an estimation of causes and effects, reverse causal questions search for the causes of effects (Gelman, 2011). Gelman (ibid) provides the following examples: why do more attractive people earn more money? Do many poor people vote for Republicans and rich people vote for Democrats?

Here are a couple of examples from our corpus:

**Le Monde.fr example**

**Marc:** Je n'ai encore pas lu une seule réaction qui témoignerait de la gratitude qu'on pourrait avoir à la pensée que des organismes efficaces, dont, hélas habituellement étrangers, nous protègent tous collectivement d'une possible menace terroriste…(I
haven’t read any post so far expressing gratitude to the thought that some efficient agencies, usually from foreign countries, protect us all from a possible terrorist threat …)

Sebastian: Les terroristes utilisent-ils le téléphone de Merkel pour préparer leurs attentats? L'idée vous traverse-t-elle l'esprit que le but des 70 millions d'interceptions en France sur un mois puisse ne pas être uniquement la lutte contre le terrorisme? (Do terrorists use Merkel’s phone to prepare their attacks? Does it occur to you that the aim of intercepting 70 million phone calls in France in a month could be something else and not fighting against terrorism?)

NYT example

Davinna: Certainly the EU's hyperventilating over Yanukovich's decision indicates the importance they place on Ukraine. Certainly, they'll accept Ukraine if a pro-EU president is elected in thirteen months. That's correct: all this rather than wait like the rest of the civilized world for free elections. Better yet, maybe the rest of us living in western 'democracies' can perform our own regime change with a similar march on Washington…

David: Exactly. We are supposed to believe that this "revolution" is over a decision not to sign an unfavourable political and economic agreement with EU? […] And we are supposed to admire people who would rather destroy[ed] their country in a civil war instead of waiting for a year and expressing their opinion democratically?

The examples above contain four reverse causal questions, among which two occur in Sebastian’s reply from Le Monde corpus and two by David from NYT corpus.
A closer look at those questions shows that the effect appears in the sentence before the cause, hence the reference reverse causal question.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In the first section of this chapter, the results presented in the previous chapter are discussed. In the second section, the findings are summarized and areas of further research are suggested.

5.1 Discussion

5.1.1 Frequencies of agreements and disagreements

The aim of studying the frequencies of agreements and disagreements in our data was to help understand statistical differences related to strong and mitigated agreements and disagreements in English and French online discussion forums. While it can be argued that disagreements constituted the majority—at least 64% — of posts in online political discussion forums, it should be emphasized that there was a considerable group of online discussion forum participants whose aim was not necessarily to agree or disagree, but to share additional relevant knowledge or personal experience on the topics under discussion. The fact that no significant difference in frequencies of agreement and disagreement was found between the English and French online communities suggest that culturally patterned cognitive differences between the two language communities are qualitative rather than quantitative.

5.1.2 Agreement and disagreement strategies in English and French online discussion forums

The analysis of agreement posts revealed that there were two main strategies used by online discussion forum participants to express agreement with previous post authors; these include using explicit agreement words and phrases and expressing
gratitude to those who held the same opinion about the topic under discussion. Explicit agreement markers generally prefaced the content of the agreement itself. Gratitude was more expressed by NYT online discussion participants (29.41% against 22.2% of agreement posts in Le Monde.fr) and was very often followed by the name of the person to whom it was directed. Gratitude appeared as a way for online discussion participants to show that they agreed completely with what was said by a previous participant. Also, a closer look at expressions of gratitude as an agreement strategy revealed that participants expressed gratitude when, in a discussion where the majority of previous contributors seemed to take a position contradicting theirs, these participants could find someone who held a position similar to theirs.

Looking at disagreements, the analysis of data revealed that there were four main disagreement strategies in English and French online political discussion forums: explicit disagreement markers, negation, sarcasm and attack. Just like agreements, disagreement markers prefaced the content of disagreement posts. However, unlike the majority of agreements that did not have explicit closings, disagreement posts in both languages had closings, which, in most cases, were directives, even though two other closing strategies (salutations and imposed ends of discussion) were exclusively found in the French language data. Unlike closing salutations that generally consisted of wishes of good health, directives and imposed ends of discussion sounded rude; closing directives, in most cases, suggested that the author whose ideas were opposed, had limited information on the topic, or sometimes, limited intelligence or reasoning abilities and, therefore, had to “wake up” and/or “get informed”. In the same vain, imposed ends of discussion found in the Le Monde.fr data were very rude, as one
participant unilaterally decided and wrote in a post that the discussion was over because his/her recipient(s) did not agree with him/her. This type of positive face threatening act shows irritation to contradiction.

Negation, in the overwhelming majority of posts in both Le Monde and NYT data, was disaffiliative and expressed disagreement. A closer look into the data revealed that online discussion forum participants preferred verbal negation to disagree with previous posts. This was probably because verbal negation was much easier to realize for most language users than non-verbal negation which required more complex grammatical constructions to put across the message.

Sarcasm and attack, the least used of disagreement strategies, were also face-threatening, as they were more or less offensive to those they were addressed to. The findings revealed that French language online discussion participants used more sarcasm and insults than their English language counterparts. Given the highest frequency of positive face threatening acts with damage to both the speaker and the hearer observed in the behavior of the French language online community, it could be said that French language online political discussion forum participants were less polite than their English language counterparts.

5.1.3 Mitigated agreements and disagreements

The fact that there were mitigated disagreements suggests that online discussion participants either cared about letting their recipients “save face”, or disagreed with parts of the posts concerned, leading to weaker disagreements, or both reasons. However, a higher frequency of mitigated agreements (than disagreements) both in the Le Monde and NYT data implies that there were many cases of partial agreements, and
that the frequency of partial agreements was higher than that of partial disagreements. These findings confirm the results of the study of frequencies of agreements and disagreements carried out in this work; online political discussion participants tend to disagree more often than they agree in asynchronous online political discussion forums. Also of importance is the fact that the findings of this study contradict those of Baym’s (1996) study, which revealed that disagreements contained more mitigation than agreements.

5.1.4 Structure of agreements and disagreements

The basic structure of an agreement or a disagreement consisted of an agreement/disagreement phrase + elaboration. However, there were varying degrees of expansions of that basic structure depending on whether the post was an agreement or a disagreement. The results of the analysis show that disagreements and agreements in the NYT online discussion data were significantly more complex than those of Le Monde.fr. In fact, the expansions found in the structure of disagreements and agreements in the NYT data were more elaborate than those of Le Monde.fr. This probably explains why, from a strictly visual perspective, NYT posts were also much longer. Moreover, data analysis revealed that the structure pre-expansion (name +/-or dis/agreement marker) + dis/agreement (author’s position + elaboration) + post-expansion (closing) emerged as the canonical form of both agreements and disagreements, although many posts comprised only the pre-expansion and the agreement/disagreement, or at times, only one of the two. A closer look at the structure of agreements/disagreements without consideration of pre- and post-expansions reveals
that they comprised two possible sub-parts: a reference to the previous post they agreed or disagreed with, and some elaboration of the position held.

5.1.5 Common ground in asynchronous online political discussion forums

The socio-cognitive analysis of CG in English and French asynchronous online political discussion forums revealed that language users always bring some socio-cultural knowledge and personal experience to the ongoing discussion. When participants discussed legal issues or used language specific acronyms for example, they were tapping into the culture-specific knowledge conferred by the membership to a specific sociolinguistic group or language community. However, as French and English are international languages spoken by millions of native and non-native speakers, and because these language users come from different cultural and socio-political backgrounds, it is highly probable that they co-construct CG more often through the context of situation in online discussion forums. The study of responsiveness illustrates this point; pronouns, naming, quoting and conjunctions/built-in structures show that online political discussion participants can successfully construct and maintain CG without a wide knowledge of the socio-cultural and political factors surrounding the topic under discussion.

A notable difference between English and French online speech communities was at the level of their use of personal pronouns. The fact that Le Monde.fr discussion participants used the first-person singular and first-person plural pronouns less often, but used the second-person plural/singular (vous) more often than NYT discussion participants, was an indication that French language users are usually less inclusive of others in discourse than English language users are. In fact, it is common that a French
language user gets offended when someone who has not sampled their point of view makes sweeping statements of opinion about a sociocultural group of which they are members. They sometimes show their disapprobation by asking the individual using the inclusive pronoun not to count them as part of the group the next time they want to make generalizations. The corollary of this behavior is that CG can be achieved by French language users with everyone keeping their identity, and not necessarily with a feeling of unanimity as projected by the inclusive second-person plural pronoun. This probably explains why Le Monde.fr discussion participants named the recipients of their messages more often than NYT discussion participants did.

The findings also revealed that quoting, built-in structures (conjunctions), deixis and lexical cohesion contribute to the co-construction and maintainance of CG. While quoting and built-in structures were more recurrent among NYT discussion participants, deixis and lexical cohesion were widely used by online discussion participants, regardless of their language of expression. From the above, CG was realized when participants in a discussion displayed communicative competence, i.e., the knowledge of grammar, as well as the sociocultural knowledge related to how and when to say things appropriately depending on the context.

Finally, CG was realized through cognitive strategies among which causality. The findings revealed that two types of causal queries, namely forward inference and reverse causal questions, were used by online political discussion participants as grounding strategies. Reverse causal queries, which were mostly used in disagreements, generally involved a considerably higher degree of manipulation than forward causal statements and questions, and were more used by online discussion participants.
irrespective of their language of expression. This grounding strategy probably translates a desire to seduce or convince through the art of asking tactful questions, and shows that most online discussion participants in our study sought to convince those who disagreed with them in the best possible appealing way. From the above analysis, grounding in web-based discussions can occur at two distinct levels, namely sociolinguistic and cognitive.

5.1.6 Common ground, agreement and disagreement in asynchronous online discussion: implications for educators

It would be too simplistic to use the findings of this study to conclude that CG occurs only or mainly in agreements whereas disagreements suggest a lack of CG. Such a conclusion would be far from the truth. Interactants already have something in common when they decide to enter a conversation, regardless of their individual positions. Emmel (2008) highlights this point when she says:

common ground presumes that, no matter what our individual positions, we do share a common interest in both individual and social growth, a willingness to enter into the rhetorical situation with an open mind, to consider, to hear, to ask questions, to make contributions. It is out of such commonalities that we forge new competencies, new understandings, new identities . . . (pp. 91-92).

Then, it was because participants wanted more knowledge and/or change that they took off their time to discuss the crises in Syria and Ukraine, or the NSA scandal. The corollary of this aspect of human behavior is that CG is likely to exist even when interactants hold radically opposed points of view (see Lawrie, 2005).
Educators can capitalize on this feature of human behavior to improve students’ face-to-face and online learning experiences. Knowledge of students’ culturally patterned cognitions could develop teachers’ awareness of and sensitivity to the ways these students differ from one another as a result of their different linguistic (and cultural) backgrounds. For instance, in collaborative learning tasks, teachers could utilize such knowledge to group students, then study collaboration within groups—notably with regard to how group members co-construct common ground, agree and disagree—and finally decide whether to maintain the groups or modify them according to the results of the study. Most classrooms today consist of students from different linguistic backgrounds; therefore, the necessity for pedagogical methods that are sensitive to different cognitive processes resulting from different cultural backgrounds cannot be underestimated. We are hopeful that further research in the domain of intercultural cognition would subsequently inform pedagogical practices.

5.2 CONCLUSION

This paper explored the discourse markers and specific grammatical structures that underlie the realization of common ground, disagreements and agreements in English and French asynchronous online political discussion forums. It also explored the type of knowledge that online discussion forum participants need in order to construct, maintain and understand common ground.

The findings of the study highlight a few points: online discussion participants were more inclined to disagree than agree on world politics topics. Strategies of agreement used in online discussion forums include explicit agreement markers and the expression of gratitude. Meanwhile, disagreement strategies used by online discussion
participants include explicit disagreement markers, negation, sarcasm and attack. However, disagreements by French language users contained two other distinctive features: closing salutations and imposed ends of discussion. Agreements and disagreements were composed of three elements: pre-expansions (prefaces), dis/agreements (elaboration of position) + post-expansions (closings). A significant difference was found in the way French and English online communities structured their agreements and disagreements. In fact, English language online discussion participants produced more complex agreements and disagreements than French language online discussion participants. It was also found that the context of situation has primacy over social knowledge in the construction and maintenance of common ground in asynchronous online discussion. English language online discussion participants displayed greater face saving behavior whereas French language online discussion participants were particularly less inclusive of others in their opinion statements. Finally, common ground results from the combination of social and linguistic elements of the context, as well as the cognitive abilities of participants in the discussion.

The findings of this study are limited only to online political discussion forums, and, therefore, cannot be generalized as consistent regarding the discourse practices of different online communities. However, they could inform professionals of online education on how to better assist learners from different linguistic backgrounds, especially at these times of growing demand for online courses, notably massive open online courses (MOOCs).
There are still many aspects of the discourse practices of different online linguistic communities that have not been studied yet. For instance, further research could investigate what is considered as the norms of discourse practices in different online linguistic communities. Other interesting studies could explore and compare the mechanisms of repair and correction by different online linguistic communities, or how different online linguistic communities deal with the notion of topic in online discussions. For instance, researchers could study differences between online linguistic communities related to topic formulation, telling stories about the topic, topic development and topic decay.
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APPENDIX A: SAMPLE OF LE MONDE.FR CORPUS

A. CRISE SYRIENNE

1. Pero Grullo il y a 21 semaines
Ils ont de la mémoire. On peut tromper une fois.....etc. Moins naïfs qu'il paraissent.
   a. A. de Tocqueville il y a 21 semaines
320 millions d'etres humains vous paraissent naïfs? Sur la foi de quoi? Homer Simpson? Spectaculaire raisonnement.

2. Bruno GUIGUE il y a 20 semaines
Sur les 110 000 morts, il y a 45 000 victimes parmi les forces gouvernementales (chiffres fournis par l'OSDH, proche de l'opposition). Si Bachar est un boucher, ses ennemis sont des grossistes ! Mais on se garde bien de citer ces chiffres lorsqu'on veut diaboliser le régime syrien en vue de justifier l'intervention étrangère.
   a. Renaud DEFRANCE il y a 20 semaines
D'accord pour considérer les vrais chiffres (s'il y en a). Mais normalement un grossiste traite de plus grosses quantités qu'un détaillant. Dans votre raisonnement même, ce devrait être Bachar, le grossiste. D'autant que de son côté ce sont des soldats, et de l'autre, des civils! Si l'on sépare les militaires et les civils, quels sont les chiffres? Pourquoi tenez-vous tant à Bachar pour le défendre contre les propres faits que vous allégez ?

   b. Samosate il y a 20 semaines
Le décompte OSDH est le suivant 45 000 soldats de Bachar 40 000 civils et 25 000 rebelles.Bien entendu , cher Renaud , les 40000 civils étaient tous pro rebelles et ont tous été tués par l'armée de Bachar. Et tout le monde sait que les rebelles n'ont jamais tué un seul civil ! C'est d'ailleurs ce que nous pouvons vérifier dans toutes les vidéos qu'ils postent sur le net ! Refaites donc vos calculs et Vous allez nous confirmer qui est le boucher et qui sont les grossistes ...

65
3. Daniel Lattanzio il y a 20 semaines
Un assassin reste un assassin.
   a. Philippe Mangé il y a 20 semaines
Tout comme les versets assassins du coran et le djihad assassin.

4. Renaud DEFRANCE il y a 21 semaines
"Le Lion de Damas"?! La Hyène de Damas", oui!
   a. Bruno GUIGUE il y a 20 semaines
Une hyène qui protège les chrétiens contre les mercenaires du Qatar !
   b. Ali le fou il y a 20 semaines
Une hyène qui protège les chrétiens: du grand n importe quoi. Assad ne protège nullement les Chrétiens, il les instrumentalise pour se maintenir au pouvoir, en les utilisant vis a vis de l Occident. D ailleurs, les Chrétiens, menaces par les djihadistes, seraient en opposition avec Bahcard, qu il n hesiterait pas a les supprimer. Au Liban, les Chrétiens Djemael qui voulaient se demarquer de Assad l ont paye de leur mort..une petite explosion. Cessez de repeter la propagande simpliste assadienne.
   c. Renaud DEFRANCE il y a 20 semaines
@Bruno GUIGUE : Quel est votre raisonnement? Quelque chose comme "Il protège "les nôtres", nous lui devons loyauté" ? Si oui, depuis quand les Chrétiens pactisent-ils (autrement que par faiblesse humaine très compréhensible) avec des tortionnaires pour obtenir protection?
5. **Philippe Mangé il y a 21 semaines**

Bachar Al-Assad est surtout et d'abord une muraille contre le sunnisme, pourquoi ne le dit-on pas plus?

a. **Ali le fou il y a 20 semaines**

Non, juste une trompette d'Assad et de sa propagande. Par contre, l'article met en evidence une des causes majeures du souvelement de Syrie: l'explosion démographique, notamment au niveau des exclus économiques du système Bachard: les sunnites, justement.

b. **Philippe Mangé il y a 20 semaines**

Au moins 5 brigades affrontent Bachar Al-Assad et s'affrontent entre elles. On constate des djihadistes d'Al Qaida, sunnites, des salafistes, sunnites, des djihadistes étrangers sunnites.....et des Kurdes marxistes. Qatar, Arabie saoudites, Frères musulmans .... etc veulent la fin du pouvoir chiite. Entre plusieurs maux, je pense que le moindre est chiite.

**B. AFFAIRE SNOWDEN**

1. **Jean-claude**

Mais quelle farce! par définition l'espionnage et tout ce qui s'y rapporte est SECRET. alors, quelle sorte d'accord pourrions nous avoir? ce sera de toutes les façons invérifiable, à moins d'avoir des traîtres du genre Snowden en grand nombre. assez curieusement, comme Assange, ce chevalier blanc n'a trahi aucun secret des russes et des chinois!!

a. **Codicille il y a 15 semaines**

Oui et non : on peut aujourd'hui dire que c'était secret. Ce ne l'est plus, c'est reconnu. Il y a donc violation du statut d'une ambassade par exemple si son toit est truffé d'antennes d'écoute. Cela change les termes des accords internationaux et leur signification. On ouvre les frontières mais on se fait piller inventions et brevets.... Il y a déséquilibre manifeste en contravention aux règles d'un accord. On ne peut pas dire que le monde y ait gagné, il est seulement prévenu.

b. **A. de Tocqueville il y a 15 semaines**

Une bonne fois pour toute, parler d'un "accord de non-espionnage" est une periphrase qui signifie "intégrer les Five Eyes", donc l'aristocratie de l'espionnage. Ca explique
justement l'ampleur du double-jeu allemand... et français, face au "scandale" Snowden. Les deux pays sont comme des insectes qui cherchaient une source de lumière dans la nuit: Snowden a enlevé l'abat-jour, et les insectes se précipitent en spirale vers la chaleur de la NSA.

2. **Christian C.**

L'Allemagne n'a pas de troupes au Mali. La France, oui. L'un n'a pas besoin des écoutes du NSA, l'autre, oui, a besoin des écoutes, des drones et de l'assistance des USA. Pour pallier les difficultés des uns et construire un avenir plus respectable, il serait bon que l'Allemagne, en pointe en ce domaine, parle pour l'Europe.

   a. **A. de Tocqueville il y a 15 semaines**

Il est évident que l'Allemagne n'a aucun intérêt international. Vous restez manifestement bloqué à la vision de l'Allemagne, limpide et naïve, qu'Adenauer cultivait en son temps. Il est temps de passer à l'âge adulte, et à 2013. Pourquoi croyez-vous que Berlin fait cavalier seul? Parce qu'il voit dans l'épisode Snowden une occasion de monter en grade, EN COMPETITION avec les autres européens, parmi les partenaires de Washington.

3. **A. De Tocqueville**

En résumé, l'Allemagne exploite les protestations instinctives de son opinion publique pour... se rapprocher encore davantage de la NSA en obtenant de meilleurs termes au sein d'un partenariat renforcé. Quelle tartufferie. Il n'est guère étonnant que certains membres du Congrès américain parlent des postures européennes comme d'un concours de candidats à l'Oscar du meilleur acteur.

   a. **Basse vue il y a 15 semaines**

Parler de tartufferie au sujet d'écoutes dans un pays qui a vécu les affres de la Stasi relève d'un malade imaginaire.... c'est mal connaître l'histoire et mal connaître les allemands même si derrière cette démarche Merkel cache une tentative de tirer son épingle du jeu européen.

b. **A. de Tocqueville il y a 15 semaines**
Vous avez du mal. C'est précisément parce que le gouvernement allemand sait si bien la reaction provoquée par l'espionnage dans l'opinion du pays, qu'il est particulièrement hypocrite qu'il envoie ses barbouzes à Washington non pas pour couper les ponts avec la NSA, mais pour signer un accord de coopération de meilleure facture.

4. **Christian Charles**

Nous en savons donc encore fort peu sur l'acheminement des informations. Mais ce que nous savons, nous le savons fort bien : 1) la NSA dispose d'info en grandes quantités en provenance de pays étrangers qu'elle traite dans ces méga cybercentres 2) que pour les collecter elle a passé des accords avec de grandes sociétés comme Google 3) qu'elle a certainement aussi passé des accords avec les services secrets de pays étrangers. 4) et cela pour un pseudo motif sécuritaire. Le problème est là.

   a. **A. de Tocqueville il y a 16 semaines**

   Si le motif sécuritaire est exclusivement "pseudo", pourquoi les pays étrangers acceptent-ils de collaborer, et utilisent les revelations non pas pour couper les ponts avec la NSA, mais pour améliorer les termes de ladite collaboration?

   b. **Tulleta Lena il y a 16 semaines**

   @Tocqueville: le motif "sécuritaire" est PSEUDO. C'est clair: ce n'est pas un motif sécuritaire, mais pseudo-sécuritaire. Le motif principal est ailleurs, et là-dessus, les gouvernements européens ayant collaboré l'ont fait pour raisons idéologiques, comme la volonté des élites oligarchiques de contrôler et induire des comportements consommateurs, dans le paradigme d'une globalisation dont les Etats-Unis veulent être le QG. Par ailleurs, ils surveillent aussi à leur insu, les vassaux...

   c. **A. de Tocqueville il y a 16 semaines**

   C'est donc de la féodalité oligarchique consumeriste? Tout s'explique! Merci, Tulleta Lena.

**CRISE UKRAINIENNE (janvier 2014)**

1. **Tatcher il y a 4 semaines**

   Au nom de quoi l'Ukraine serait membre (ou candidate) à l'UE??Pourquoi pas l'Indonésie? Est-ce que les Ukrainiens savent, que si par malheur, ils se retrouvaient
dans l'Europe, tout serait décimé dans leur économie actuelle et dans leur agriculture? A titre d'exemple, lire un mensuel, qui consacre un subtil article sur "les évangélistes de Bruxelles dans les campagnes roumaines" qui n'a qu'une utilité: ruiner l'agriculture de subsistance. Au nom de l'Europe.

a. **la géographie pour les nuls il y a 4 semaines**

si l'Ukraine n'est pas en Europe où se trouve t elle ? en Afrique ? en Asie ? en Amérique ? en Océanie ? mais peut être que pour vous l'Europe se réduit à l'UE ?

b. **R Y il y a 4 semaines**

L'Ukraine est déjà en Europe me semble-t-il, sa candidature pour l'UE parait assez logique (contrairement à l’Indonésie, hein).

2. **F.G. il y a 4 semaines**

Quel est l'intérêt de jeter des cocktails Molotov par milliers sur les policiers ? Se dérouler ? Ou attiser la violence et encourager les policiers à se venger à la première occasion ? Les entretiens ci-dessus montrent une pauvreté de réflexion affligeante chez ces activistes. Autre illustration : sur la seconde photo, on lit "antifa" (antifasciste) et "ACAB" (All Cops Are Bastards, tous les flics sont des salauds) d'une main, et "ACAB" plus une croix celtique (emblème fasciste) d'une autre main.

a. **R Y il y a 4 semaines**

Malheureusement le seul dialogue que le gouvernement ukrainien entend c'est celui de la violence, les gens en ont peut-être marre d'être ignorés à ce point après des semaines de manifestation pacifique. C'est justement les actions du gouvernement et des policiers qui ont fait grandir une telle colère et les violences qui s'en suivent.

3. **Yann Amar il y a 4 semaines**

Les ligues d'extrême droite se préparent à un coup de force à Kiev. Espérons que le gouvernement ukrainien parviendra à sauver la démocratie dans ce pays.

a. **R Y il y a 4 semaines**

le gouvernement ukrainien ignore ce qu'est une démocratie, et ne respecte pas la constitution ukrainienne, cela depuis bien longtemps.

4. **Tocqueville Bastiat il y a 4 semaines**

Selon Poutine il est donc inacceptable de vouloir ne pas être dirigé par des étrangers... ROLFMAO il a toujours le mot pour rire ce Poutine. Quant à la liberté des peuples à
disposer d'eux-même, on repassera donc, c'est ça ? Heureusement que les ukrainiens, qui savent s'unir de l'Est à l'Ouest des frontières du pays, sont là pour nous montrer qu'en fait c'est toujours le peuple qui a le vrai pouvoir. (Tant qu'on peut communiquer vite, vive Internet !)

a. **Z il y a 4 semaines**
"Je ne peux imaginer comment nos partenaires européens réagiraient si, au plus fort d'une crise dans un pays comme la Grèce ou Chypre, notre ministre des Affaires étrangères participait à un rassemblement anti-européen et commençait à donner des conseils" aux manifestants. L'ingérence dénoncée est celle de la présence sur place des responsables politiques européens et américains.

5. **Yann Amar il y a 4 semaines**
Le Monde soutient ces manifestants depuis le début..... Erreur, naïveté ou complicité ?

a. **Regrets il y a 4 semaines**
Et oui , toujours cette pitoyable attitude de vouloir se positionner "du côté du bien" , sans (vouloir/ pouvoir) en considérer les effets pervers ...Il doit tout de même encore rester de bons connaisseurs de l'Histoire et de la géopolitique au Monde ? je le lis depuis 50 ans ... et oui Ah André Fontaine ...

6. **Vincent Hoverla il y a 4 semaines**
Il est dommage que les télés françaises ne parlent que des "extrême droite", des "ultra-nationaliste incontrôlés" etc. Arrêtez de transposer les peurs des Français sur la situation en Ukraine où les termes "nationaliste", "droite" ne veulent pas dire la même chose que chez nous. Il est normal que les 1res lignes soient tenues par les gens déterminés et non pas des filles ou des babouchkas (qui sont à l'arrière sur Maïdan). Et vu les forces en face, oui il faut s'entraîner pour y résister.

a. **Curieux il y a 4 semaines**
Et les gens de "Svoboda", cela vous parle ?
APPENDIX B: SAMPLE OF NEW YORK TIMES DATA

A. SYRIAN CRISIS (28 August-28 September)

1. pasbaxo Netherlands 3 September 2013
Evidence to gas attack initiatives frome side of Assads opponents from Jihad
Islamic Holy War movement could be found in capture of Assads chemical gaz factory Al
Saphira near Aleppo end 2012 and august 2013 by Al Nustra Front, allied to El Quada.
Nustra Front collaborates with Free Syrian Army against Syrian
Governments' Army. Nustra Front is approached by Obama "surpassing a red line" in his fight
against Assad, referring to British newspapers. Western political struggle against
Islamic terrorism is killing itself if collaborating with El Quada/ Al Nustra.

a. A.R.Shams Pakistan 3 September 2013
If Iraq attack was unjustified, attack on Syria may also be the similar.

2. bzg ca 28 August 2013
Obama must respond in a limited way to poison gas attacks or mass civilian killings(Ask
Clinton about Rwanda). We should not have been in Iraq, limited in Afghanistan but
the use of nerve gas is a weapon that allows a few to dominate the many with little
effort. We should not commit any troops but destroy in a limited way air fields that
Assad needs to launch air attacks. We should have responded to Saddam Hussein when
he gassed the Kurds.
I doubt the free Syrian Army is free but filled with jihadist/western hating groups. The civil
war is not winnable by either side and we should not do anything to change that. The
war will drain both the Iranians/Hezbollah as well as the Saudi backed Sunni radical
Islamists. A negotiated peace is about 10 years away.

a. grantgreen west orange 29 August 2013
You are pretty smug in your assessment! Peace in 10 years ..you don't say..
Just bomb airfields. How do you know the nerve agent wasnt sent by a missile?
How do know it wasn't the rebels? Lots of questions. But we must do something right? Wrong.
3. Johndrake07 NYC 28 August 2013

US accuses USSR of supplying chemical weapons to Vietnam and Laos. The “yellow rain” was actually honeybee feces. US bombs “chemical weapons factory” in Sudan - it made pharmaceutical drugs.

US accuses Iraq of possessing chemical weapons - it didn’t.

US links anthrax attacks to Iraq as justification for regime change - with no connection to Iraq.

US accuses Syrian government of using chemical weapons…yet evidence disputes claim.

US, Britain and Israel all used chemical weapons within the last 10 Years.

US used white phosphorus against Iraqi civilians in 2004.

Israel used white phosphorous in 2009’s Operation Cast Lead despite ratifying Protocol III of Geneva Convention which outlaws the use of incendiary weapons.

The US General Staff avows it is against the law of land warfare to employ WP against personnel targets.

US National Safety Council states “the combustion of WP removes oxygen from the air, burns skin to the bone and suffocate all life.”

US called white phosphorous a chemical weapon when Saddam used it against the Kurds - although the US supplied Saddam with chemical weapons.

US and UK have used Depleted Uranium in every war to date. DU causes the Gulf War Syndrome, birth defects, cancer, genetic mutations – resulting in a “large-scale public health disaster” and the “highest rate of genetic damage in any population ever studied” – after intense attacks by US on Iraqi targets.

Israel used depleted uranium in Syria and Lebanon.

And we condemn Assad?

a. Mrs. T Chicago 30 August 2013

How about a little fact checking on yourself?

Make no mistake, Depleted Uranium is toxic, but there is no proof of what you say about causing cancer, genetic mutations, etc. As a matter of fact, it is utilized to prevent exactly those threats to our health (see below).

DU is not a chemical weapon; it is a material much more dense than steel, and for that matter, lead. Simply put, when wrapped around a traditional bomb, it turns the bomb into a "bunker buster." It is slightly radioactive. But not so much, and as a matter of fact,
because of its incredible density it is used as a SHIELD FOR MEDICAL-USE RADIATION.

So, your hyperbolic statements are not based on many facts. BTW, "every war to date"??! Did the US and UK use DU on eachother in the Revolutionary War? Maybe the War of 1812?

4. **daniwitz13 Hawaii 27 August 2013**
Mr. Kerry makes it clear that chemicals were used. What he does NOT know is who did it. Just if it was Assad, some action will be taken. But what "IF" it was done by the Rebels, what then, do the US take some kind of action on the Rebels? I happen to think not. The US Only wants to punish Assad and will not punish with force the other side. Period. Regime change is the only game the US knows how to play, Pity.

a. **serban is a trusted commenter Miller Place 27 August 2013**
The probability that this was done by rebels is zero. They do not have the means of delivery which requires missiles armed with toxic nerve gas. I wouldn't put it past jihadists to employ such tactics but they do not have access to sophisticated weaponry. Simply spraying it around will not cause massive casualties.

b. **Radek Portland, Oregon 27 August 2013**
You are wrong, Serban- the rebels do have such access to chemical weapons, as they have taken over many military bases that posses them. The arms could also have come from the rebels' sponsors abroad (like the Saudis) and since the rebels are allied with al-Qaeda, that also provides another potential route for entry. The rebels very much have the capability to have done this, and would benefit far more from having done it. We need to at least allow the UN inspectors in Syria to simply do their jobs.

B. **SNOWDEN AFFAIR (25 June-28 September)**

1. **j. von hettlingen** is a trusted commenter Switzerland 29 June 2013
Lonnie Snowden didn't feel that his son, Edward had "committed treason". He agreed that Edward had "betrayed his government", but he didn't believe that "he has betrayed the people of the United States".
Who elected the government? The voters - "people of the United States"! In Snowden’s case, a
treason is - semantically - a violation of the allegiance he owed to his own country, by
abusing his position and leaking data to a third country.

a. junius Brutus 1 July 2013

To owe allegiance to a country or king is not the same thing as treason. Mr. Snowden has not
revealed anything of a secret nature which could in some way cause the US to lose a
war, nor has he revealed the names of any American agents.

Mr. Snowden has, apparently violated the very un-American set of laws put into effect after the
attack by Arab terrorists. This Patriot act has been construed by American intelligence
and government agents to mean they can "spy" upon every person in the world without
having to justify their actions. This is clearly a betrayal of American law and history.
America has been embarassed by this revelation but that is a crime only in places like
China or Russia parts of the Africa and various former vassals of the USSR.

Until now, embarrassing the US government has never been seen or considered as a criminal
act until now.

b. E. Nowak Chicagoland, IL 1 July 2013

The U.S. Constitution says that, "Treason against the United States, shall consist only in
levying War against them, or in adhering to their Enemies, giving them Aid and
Comfort."

How does telling the U.S. citizenry about government abuses in any "helping the enemy" or
"levying war" against us?

c. A. Stanton Dallas, TX 28 June 2013

“Youngster, let that show you what it is to be without a family, without a home, and without a
country. And if you are ever tempted to say a word or to do a thing that shall put a bar
between you and your family, your home, and your country, pray God in his mercy to
take you that instant home to his own heaven. Stick by your family, boy; forget you
have a self, while you do everything for them. Think of your home, boy; write and
send, and talk about it. Let it be nearer and nearer to your thought, the farther you have
to travel from it; and rush back to it when you are free, as that poor black slave is doing
now. And for your country, boy,” and the words rattled in his throat, “and for that flag,”
and he pointed to the ship, “never dream a dream but of serving her as she bids you,
though the service carry you through a thousand hells. No matter what happens to you, no more matter who flatters you or who abuses you, never look at another flag, never let a night pass but you pray God to bless that flag. Remember, boy, that behind all these men you have to do with, behind officers, and government, and people even, there is the Country Herself, your Country, and that you belong to Her as you belong to your own mother. Stand by Her, boy, as you would stand by your mother, if those devils there had got hold of her to-day!"

Edward Everett Hale, "The Man Without a Country."

d. junius Brutus 1 July 2013

This story of Hales, written at the beginning of the Civil War, is the story of a young graduate of the USM academy, sentenced to permanent isolation on a US military vessel for having the temerity to make a hasty and poorly worded statement displeasing to another military officer who presided at his court martial. As a result, he is kept imprisoned for some 50 years, until he dies of old age. Every time the ship's captains ask that he be pardoned they are refused.

Had we treated the Confederacy similarly, the US government would have had to build tens of thousands of prison ships to keep million American soldiers of the COnfederacy-constructive traitors all, who had acted on their words in breaking with the USA in.

I always thought that was a terrible story and I suspect it might not have been published a few years later.

2. sleeve West Chester PA 28 June 2013

What's with all the secret cables and apologies from Assange? I thought he lived for transparency and openness? Oh, not when he wants to keep a secret. Of course.

a. notme notthere 1 July 2013

Assange 'lives for' GOVERNMENT transparency. He believes GOVERNMENT should be transparent to its citizens, not the other way around.

You have no democracy with a government that operates in secrecy, but there is no freedom if citizen's lives are under the scrutiny of the government.
I don't know why some people don't get the huge difference between government and individual transparency. In a democracy, governments are public and citizens are private.

What makes you say Assange's cables or emails are 'secret'? When you send a cable or email, is it open to the public?

b. E. Nowak Chicagoland, IL 1 July 2013

Does the word, "privacy" mean anything to people like you?

c. Pediatrician X Columbus Ohio 1 July 2013

Exactly that. Secrecy for Assange, Greenwald, and Snowden, but all governmental information and intelligence should just be thrown out there, for all to see.

3. Todd Atlanta 28 June 2013

Snowden's naïveté and boundless narcissism are the real crimes here. At what point will his supporters realize that while he may be no intentional traitor, his greatest achievement has been to bolster true autocracies at the expense of our own international standing.

And for the inevitable rebuttal that this is not about Snowden but about the leaks.. well guess what, HE demanded his identity be made public. HE fled to China and now Russia. HE is responsible for this narrative. Oh, and those leaks? Most Americans aren't scandalized. China and Russia sure are happy though. Thanks, Ed. What a hero.

a. E. Nowak Chicagoland, IL 1 July 2013

"...His greatest achievement has been to bolster true autocracies at the expense of our own international standing."

How, exactly, is he doing that? Or are you just parroting what you heard on one of those Sunday morning brainwashing shows?

b. Edward Hershey Portland, Oregon 28 June 2013

Will the US government launch an investigation to determine who leaked these private Ecuadorian diplomatic exchanges to the Times?

c. E. Nowak Chicagoland, IL 1 July 2013

It was leaked to Univision, not the Times. But I agree, who's going to investigate those leakers?
C. UKRAINIAN CRISIS (January 2014)

1. AndySouth Kharkov 22 January 2014
Having protect this "faithfull" ultra-right terrorist you were claiming government as a totalitarian. Brilliant!
After that i hope if such faithfull guys make some activity in your city you wont be worried.
I wonder why goverment does not punish soccer clabs what this terrorist stem from...

Andrey,
You should emigrate to Russia - you will feel right at home there. Do you benefit from the police corruption which is particularly bad in Kharkiv? If not why are you supporting them?

b. Walt Z Kiev 21 January 2014
Who cares what Russians think about the protests. It not their country, so stay out of it. They have a twisted mentality believing that Ukraine is their country. Nyet!!!

2. Gerry kingston, canada 21 January 2014
Ya, and the Americans think they own us. Wait a minute, they bought us a long time ago.
Putin is just mimicking history. Alaska was not fought over, it was exchanged.
Putin put an offer any Ukraine would find hard to refuse.

a. Danram Dallas, TX 21 January 2014
Russia has no intention of staying out of it. This is exactly what they want. Yanukovich knew exactly what would happen if he rammed that law through parlaiment.
I'd bet my last dollar that Russia has hundreds of FSB operatives in Ukraine right now working with local organized crime hoods to destabilize the situation. They'll cause as much chaos as possible and then blame it on the pro-European demonstrators.
Eventually, Yanukovich will formally "invite" Russian troops into his country to help "restore order". Russian forces will flow into Ukraine and occupy the country, the protest demonstrations will be broken up with tear gas and water cannons, untold thousands will be arrested and thrown in jail, and Ukraine will have become a de facto part of a second Soviet Union ... which is what Vladimir Putin has wanted all along.
Then Putin and Yanukovich will both thumb their noses at the impotence west and laugh, knowing full well that the spineless schmuck who currently resides in the White House won't lift a finger to stop them, nor will the EU. Welcome to the gulag. Same as it ever was.

3. **Tapp Usa 21 January 2014**  
Russia is right, someone has a vested interest in creating this disruption and chaos, just like in Thailand. I wonder who this could be? We all know. The once good guys have become the once bad guys. Where is Putin?

a. **J. Von Hettlingen is a trusted commenter Switzerland 22 January 2014**  
There's nobody in particular, who "has a vested interest in creating this disruption and chaos, just like in Thailand".  
Protests go viral beyond borders, if people elsewhere share same grievances.

4. **Taras Kulynych 21 January 2014**  
The time for a peaceful resolution has seemed to come to an end. The government of Ukraine has refused all propositions made by the opposition. The voice of Ukraine can be heard in the streets; they are protesting a corrupt regime. They demand liberty and a true democracy while the government passes laws which make it a crime to participate in protests. It is time to take down the Ukrainian government by force and hold them accountable for their actions. I salute those who are out there to make Ukraine a better place. #euromaidan

a. **DS97 21 January 2014**  
Taras - Thank you, for demonstrating the true face of the opposition. Far from a pluralistic "democratic" movement, it is pretty clear that the protest movement is an extremist far right fringe whose aim is to seize power by any available means. Since "peaceful" protest is not working out, you're resorting to the more traditional methods.

5. **Bill Wolfe Bordentown, NJ 21 January 2014**  
If this doesn't make it absolutely clear why the NSA and the telecoms should not be spying on us, nothing will.
US already has similar "protest zone" restrictions and legal threats under NDAA.
We are losing our democracy and failing to see all the warning signs along the way.

If anything Bill – To me the recent NSA disclosures on "spying" are not the real threat. To me
the real threat to democracy is an agency who spends billions of dollars of our money
on activities that give every indication that said agency is struggling to justify its
existence. The most critical line of this story might be – "The messages appeared to
have little effect." – Think about it for a moment – this outcome is what an agency like
the NSA is more afraid of than anything else. It means they're irrelevant.