

# HASHTAG AS MODERN TEXT FORMAT IN LINGUISTICS

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## INTRODUCTION

The development of modern technologies is reflected in the process of social network communication. Web space has become not only a sphere of language realisation, nowadays it is a space which its own language and rules. Appearance of new text formats testifies to dynamic tendencies in discourse evolution (ALEKSANDROVA et al., 2017; MALYUGA, 2020).

Thus, language of the internet performs its own functions in the internet discourse. Graphical presentation of the message plays an important role in the process of internet communication. It helps to create special structure of the whole message. Thus,

hashtags are one of the elements of internet communication that perform specific functions and are formed according to specific rules. The relevance of the research topic is determined by the appearance of new linguistic phenomenon such as hashtag text. The process of hashtagging has recently appeared in modern life but it has influenced the way people get and transmit information (BOYD; ELLISON, 2007).

Many scientists from other fields of study such as marketing or PR have already drawn their attention to this phenomenon but from the linguistic point of view hashtags have not been studied properly yet. The purpose of the study is to provide the analysis of hashtag as text format and figure out the main function and special types of graphical realisation of hashtags. The research is based on the material of Russian and foreign scientists who have already studied hashtag from linguistic perspective. The works taken as theoretical basis for our article are modern and relevant as the study of hashtag as the element of linguistic study has begun recently.

The results of the analysis can be used for further study of hashtags as linguistic phenomenon. The results of the analysis will help to understand the basic functions and types of graphical presentation of hashtags. The received results demonstrate for what purposes hashtags are used in the social network. Moreover, it shows how the social network users can form the hashtags to fulfil different functions.

## THEORETICAL BASIS

In the context of the study, we speak about hashtag as text format following Navoloka (2018) who mentions in her work that hashtags are presented as a new text format of the internet. She defines the term text and then presents the definition of the term hashtag text, discussing their categorical features. The study demonstrates that hashtags have the right to be called as hashtag text, as they have the same categorical features as the ordinary text (KOZLOVSKAYA; RASTYAGAEV; SOLZHENIKINA, 2020).

Galperin (2006) presents the following definition of the term text. It is understood as the product of speech generation process. It is a message that has special content, organised according to the model of one of the message forms existing in the literary language and characterised by its own distinctive features. Navoloka (2018) says that hashtags as new forms of the text are formed according to their own special rules and peculiarities. Following the idea of V.G. Admoni (1985) it is claimed that hashtag text is a type of small-format texts. This main feature is determined by the pragmatic function of virtual communication, when the participants want to transmit a great amount of information using as few language units as possible (MALYUGA; MCCARTHY, 2018; KHARKOVSKAYA; PONOMARENKO; RADYUK, 2017).

According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online Hashtag is a word or phrase that starts with the symbol # and that briefly indicates what a message is about. Patrusheva (2018) in her scientific article speaks about the process of hashtag usage as a new communicative process. She claims about the extension of hashtag functions and presents the classification according to functions and topics.

Nowadays hashtags are more than only the markers of the topic. They have extended their functional variability and now perform more functions than before. Kaygorodova (2015) analysing hashtags as new media phenomenon among cognitive structures of the internet follows the classification of hashtag functions presented by foreign scientists Daer, Hoffmann, Goodman (2014). According to this classification hashtags are defined as:

- Emphasising;
- Critiquing;
- Identifying;
- Iterating;
- Rallying.

The following classification proves the idea that functional abilities of hashtags in the social network today are much wider than some years ago. Wikström (2014) investigates in his study different communicative functions that hashtags perform in written communication from a linguistic pragmatic perspective. Hashtags as language devices are used for structuring the information, playing games, engaging in meta-commentary.

Hashtags are used on social network sites like Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. The users refer to hashtag application for different reasons (ZAPPAVIGNA, 2011). Thus, talking about hashtag functions we can highlight the fact that their functions are diverse. Each author of the message uses the hashtag according to the goal he/she wants to reach. The functions of hashtags depend on their graphical presentation and types of word-formation.

## METHODOLOGY

We have chosen Instagram as the material of the research as Instagram is one of the most popular virtual platforms used today. Instagram is a form of micro blogging where the users can post photos or videos adding the description of them under their post. This fact allows us to speak about the publications made on Instagram as the example of creolised text (NAVOLKA, 2018). Under creolised text according to Sorokin, Tarasov (1990) we understand the material that consists of two inhomogeneous parts: verbal (language), non-verbal (belonging to other sign systems rather than natural language).

The data were collected using the continuous sampling method. Therefore, we have chosen 150 publications that have 300 hashtags for the analysis. Descriptive qualitative method was used to classify and analyse hashtags according to their functions, types of hashtag construction and the position according to the post. The quantitative method is related to the frequency of the usage of different categories. The percentage of the frequency of usage was presented using a pie diagram.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

With the performed analysis of the chosen hashtags, we have figured out the functions that hashtags perform on Instagram. The analysis is displayed in table 1.

**Table 1.** The functional variability of hashtags.

Topic of hashtag	The purpose of usage
Social or political events	To draw the attention of the audience to some social or political events, to speed up the spread of information.
Different topics (fashion, sport, travelling, healthy lifestyle etc.)	To group the information that refers to one and the same topic.
Communication	To unite some groups of social network users, provide their further communication devoted to the common topic.
Advertising of goods or services	To promote goods or services, to draw user's attention to them
Expression of emotions	To underline personal attitude towards event or situation, to comment it.

**Source:** Search data.

Due to the performed analysis, we can figure out different functions of hashtags that depend on the purpose of their usage and the topic they refer to. Let us demonstrate it on examples.

Social movement Black Lives Matter is well known all over the world. Activists try to bring justice, healing and freedom to black people across the globe. To provide the spread of the information devoted to this topic and to draw the attention of people from all over the world, the social movement the struggle has moved to social network. Thus, #BlackLivesMatter appeared on Twitter and Instagram and caused a great response.

Hashtags also group the information according to different features. It can be the grouping according to geo-tags like #London, #NYC, #dubai, #topoftheworld for Empire State Building. Hashtags of this category can also serve as branded hashtags that have the name of the brand in their construction like #CocaCola, #Audi, #HerbalEssences, #vancleefalhambra. Moreover, the hashtags of this category can group the messages of the common topic like #sport, #beauty, #art, #style etc.

Hashtags that are used to provide communication between the users can also call for activity and likes to promote the social network account, for example, #likeforlike, #follow4follow, #commentback, #followme.

Hashtags used for social network promotion contain both descriptive hashtags like #naturalshampoo, #leatherbag, #blackdress but they also have another category that can be called as author's hashtags. These hashtags are usually unique and exclusive.

For example, #strongerthantime, #WithItalyforItaly for car advertising; #cleanbeauty, #PlantPowerinEveryShower, #coloristheanswer for the promotion of beauty and cosmetic products.

To express emotions and to draw attention to their posts the authors invent their own creative hashtags #whatveganseat, #travellingtheworld, #instapassport, #travelgram etc. Thus, according to the performed analysis we can claim that hashtags on Instagram perform various functions. The choice of a hashtag depends on the goal that the author wants to reach considering the sphere of hashtag application (NAVOLKA, 2018).

In our study we have also analysed the way of hashtags graphical presentation. This analysis will help us to understand what types of hashtags are used in their composition. Following Caleffi (2015) we take into account the number of words or other signs in the hashtag. The results of the performed analysis are shown in table 2.

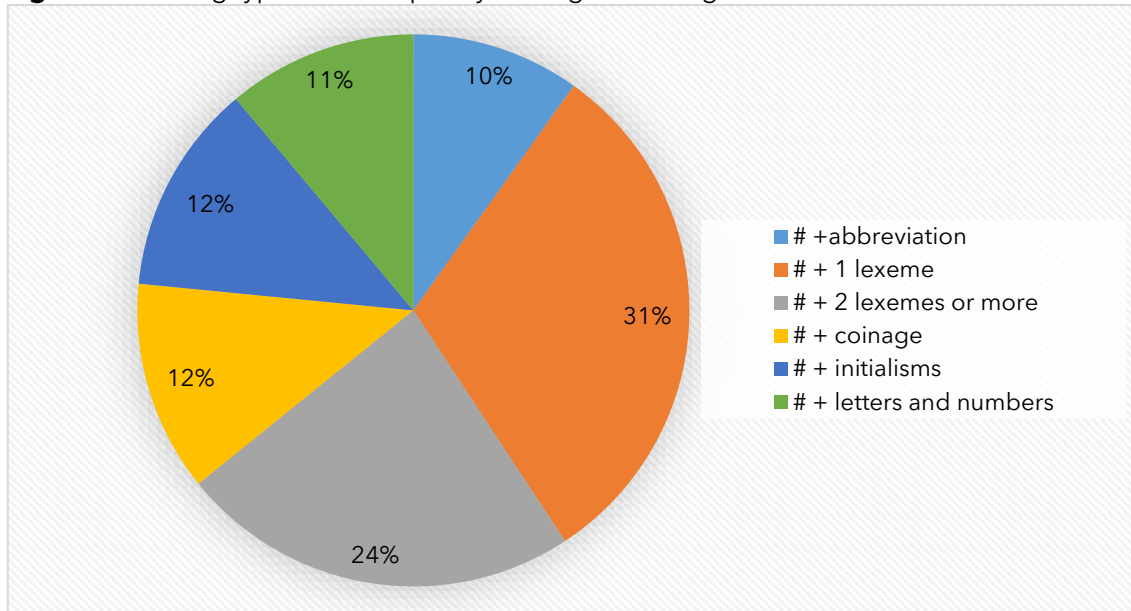
**Table 2.** Types of English hashtags

Type of hashtag	Example
# + abbreviation	#NYC
# + 1 lexeme	#sport, #london, #run
# + 2 lexemes or more	#sportmotivation, #justdoit
# + coinage	#instafood, #instahotel
# + initialisms	#OOTD = Outfit of the Day
# + letters and numbers	#like4like #4you

**Source:** Search data.

We have studied the chosen hashtags and have classified them according to the number and types of words or other signs that follow after #. We can conclude that after the analysis of chosen hashtags we can figure out 6 different types found on Instagram. All hashtags have their contextual meaning and perform different functions. The percentage of hashtag types according to the frequency of their usage is presented using a pie diagram. See Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** Hashtag types. The frequency of usage on Instagram.

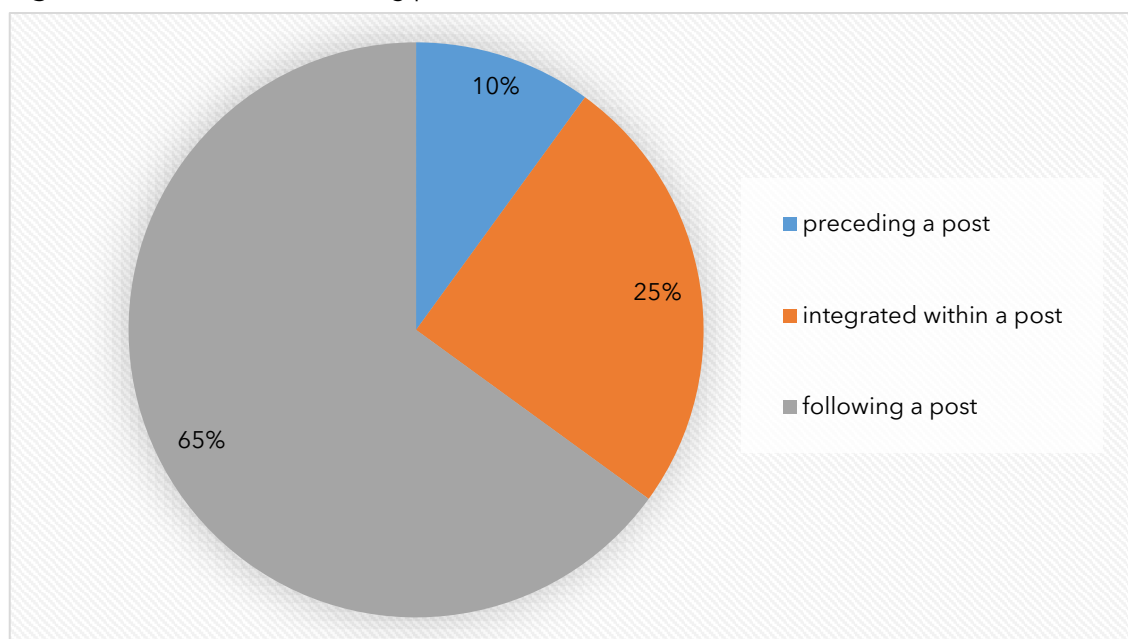


**Source:** Search data.

Hashtags are flexible. They have 3 different positions according to the post. Following Zappavigna (2015) we distinguish:

- Hashtags preceding a post
- Hashtags integrated within a post
- Hashtags following the post.

Following the idea of Mahfouz, Iman M. (2020) we summarise the data. Figure 2 displays the distribution of hashtags position according to the post.

**Figure 2.** Distribution of hashtag position

**Source:** Search data.

According to the Figure 2 we can see that the most hashtags are following the post. They are used as additional information after the main message. Very few hashtags precede the post. Their functional position is to designate the type of a post or to make an announcement. Similarly, few hashtags are used as the part of the main message. They are integrated in the structure of the post and function as part of its syntactic structure. The above analysis has revealed the characteristics and features of hashtags as new emerging linguistic items. The results of the performed analysis may be used for further study of hashtags as language units.

## CONCLUSION

At the present stage of development, the society is under the influence of the process of globalisation. It contributes to the development and the emergence of new concepts and phenomena in all spheres of life (MALYUGA; MCCARTHY, 2020). The virtual space is also developing and transforming. Hashtags are used as the main tools for communication and promotion within the social network.

Hashtags are becoming new elements of linguistic study. When hashtagging people want to reach different goals and use hashtags to perform various tasks. Hashtags have expanded their functional variability. They are no longer used as only a marker for the post, they attract attention to important events, promote goods and services, express emotions, provide the communication (SCHURINA, 2015).

In our work we have studied hashtag text as new linguistic phenomenon. We have figured out the functions that hashtags fulfil on Instagram, we have distinguished hashtags into different categories according to their type and the position in the post. All these factors can be useful as the material for the further development of hashtags as linguistic and marketing mechanisms. The prospects for the further development of this topic are determined by the relevance, novelty and unresolved issues of this area of linguistic research.

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## Hashtag as modern text format in linguistics

Hashtag como formato de texto moderno em linguística

Hashtag como formato de texto moderno en lingüística

### Resumo

Atualmente as tecnologias modernas da Internet possuem um papel fundamental em nossa vida. O presente artigo retrata as peculiaridades dos hashtags como novo formato de texto utilizado nas redes sociais. O artigo apresenta as características do texto, a classificação das funções e os tipos de hashtags de acordo com a sua construção e posição na postagem. Diferentes tipos de hashtags foram submetidos à análise. O método de amostragem contínua, a análise qualitativa descritiva e a análise quantitativa permitiram aos autores chegar à conclusão sobre as hashtags como ferramentas linguísticas. Como resultado, cinco funções de hashtag e seis tipos de hashtag foram identificados. Essas descobertas ajudariam a entender o discurso online moderno e a provar a ideia de que as hashtags são consideradas elementos significativos de comunicação em rede social.

**Palavras-chave:** Hashtag. Formação e texto de hashtag. Instagram, comunicação na internet. Linguística.

### Abstract

Nowadays modern Internet technologies play an important role in our life. The present article deals with the peculiarities of hashtags as new text format used in social network. The article presents characteristic features of hashtag text, classification of hashtag functions, types of hashtags according to their construction and the position of hashtags in the post. Different types of hashtags were subjected to the analysis. Continuous sampling method, descriptive qualitative and quantitative analysis allowed the authors to conclude about hashtags as linguistic tools. As a result, five hashtag functions and six hashtag types were identified. These findings would help to understand modern online discourse and to prove the idea that hashtags are considered as meaningful elements of social network communication.

**Keywords:** Hashtag. Hashtag formation and text. Instagram. Internet communication. Linguistics.

### Resumen

Hoy Internet tecnologías modernas son muy importante. Este artículo se trata de los particularidades de hashtags que son una nueva forma del texto. El artículo presenta las características del hashtag texto, la clasificación de sus funciones y los tipos según su construcción y la posición en el post. En el artículo los autores analizaron diferentes tipos de hashtags. Para hacer un análisis se utilizaron los siguientes métodos: los métodos de muestreo continuo, el análisis cualitativo descriptivo y el análisis cuantitativo. Estas formas de la investigación han ayudado a sacar ciertas conclusiones. Como resultado tenemos 5 funciones de hashtags y 6 tipos de hashtags. Con los resultados podemos entender el online discurso moderno, confirmar la idea de que los hashtags son los elementos significados de la comunicación en las redes sociales.

**Palabras-clave:** Hashtag. La formación y texto del hashtag, Instagram. Comunicación por internet. Lingüística.