Languaging Diversity
international conference

LANGUAGING IDENTITIES IN CHANGING TIMES

Challenges and opportunities

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PREFACE

Languaging Diversity is an international biennial conference of the I-Land Inter-university Research Center, an international and interdisciplinary center based at the University of Napoli L'Orientale, Italy. It welcomes scholars interested in a variety of fields such as Linguistics, Social Sciences, and the Humanities. The concepts of identity and diversity are at the core of the conference series. These are investigated cross-culturally, cross-linguistically and from interdisciplinary perspectives.

Following the seven successful events hosted by the Universities of Napoli (2013), Catania (2014), Macerata (2016), Cagliari (2017), Antwerp (2018), Teruel (2019), and Lille (2021), the eighth edition of the Languaging Diversity conference (LD2023) is organized by the University of Torino, Italy.

The present volume is a collection of extended abstracts submitted to the 8th edition of the Languaging Diversity Conference (LD2023) titled 'Languaging identities in changing times: Challenges and opportunities'. The 2023 version of the conference is jointly organised by the Department of Foreign Languages, Literature and Modern Cultures and the Department of Cultures, Politics and Society at the University of Torino, Italy.

The theme of the conference focuses on the representation and the languaging of identities against the backdrop of our rapidly changing societies. Cultures, traditions, and customs are evolving very quickly; in the same way, the interpretation of the concept of identity is undergoing a significant transformation. Languaging Diversity 2023 brings together researchers from a wide range of research disciplines and from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The contributions explore how people embrace the opportunities and overcome the challenges of current times to create a space for their identities to be acknowledged and recognized.

The book of abstracts gathers four plenary talks, four panels that include twenty presentations, seventy-two parallel presentations and six poster presentations, totaling a number of 102 talks. The abstracts discuss the conference theme in relation to gender and sexuality, ethnicity, disability, ageism, religion, ecology, medicine and science, media, politics, the law, education, and learning. The abstracts in this volume also reflect a broad range of the spectrum of theoretical and analytical approaches to study the interface between language and identity such as ethnographic, case studies, multimodal, multilingual, translational, textual and corpus-based methods.

Keywords: identity representation; identity transformation; language dynamics; Cultural dynamics; challenges and adaptation.

Conference Venue

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A MULTIMODAL DISCOURSE APPROACH TO THE CONSTRUCTION/EXPRESSION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY IN POLITICAL LEADERS’ TELEVISED STATEMENTS AT THE OUTBREAK OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The health crisis originating from the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 forced political leaders to adopt unprecedented measures all around the world (e.g. social distancing and lockdown). To some extent, such measures went against the democratic values of Western countries, in that fundamental values such as freedom of movement were restricted. The global dimension of the problem made this “an exceptional moment” (Wahnich 2022, 17) for discourse analysis research, as top leaders (heads of states and governments) had to make swift decisions in a very short time lapse owing to the spread of the pandemic. Notwithstanding the need for global reaction, responses were managed and communicated locally. Political leaders made televised official statements (announcements and declarations) to inform all the people in the countries they represented. A few studies have already highlighted salient features of such statements, e.g., the use of war metaphors and other rhetorical devices to gain legitimacy, credibility, and authority, along with the identification of the virus as enemy (Amossy & Wahnich 2022; Berrocal *et al*. 2021).

The present study took a multimodal approach (see, for example, Di Silvestro & Venuti 2021) to the pandemic-related televised statements by five leaders (representatives of France, Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom and the USA) in their respective languages to look for evidence of national and political identity construction/expression on a visual and verbal level. The corpus consists of five statements totaling 9,000 words approximately. Although they differ in length, duration, and format, they all belong to the political textual genre and share the same subject, namely the implementation of the toughest measures adopted under the declared state of emergency. Drawing on Critical Discourse Analysis and Pragmatics,

a comparative analysis was carried out to highlight possible un/shared patterns emerging from different semiotic layers: the settings in which these statements were made, speakers' nonverbal communication (paralanguage and kinesics) (Poyatos 2002) and verbal communication. By using lexicometric and concordance tools, it was possible to consider systematically all the occurrences of verbal resources such as deixis, which plays a fundamental role in establishing a link between text and context. In this particular case, the focus was on the opposition between the different referents designated by relevant personal pronouns, i.e., the leaders, their governments, their Nations and People, and the virus. While all the leaders appear to share a number of communicative features typical of solemn, political public declarations, they also display marked differences in the ways they construct and express their national and political ethos.

With regard to the setting, two leaders (Sánchez and Trump) spoke standing behind a lectern, one in the government building's conference room and the other in an outdoor space, i.e., the Rose Garden of the White House. The other leaders appeared sitting at a desk, either in the government's press room (Conte) or in a seemingly more intimate space such as their office (Macron and Johnson). All these settings are clearly marked by national and official symbols (flags and coats of arms) and only the US president is surrounded by other representatives.

Among the main nonverbal communication features, all the leaders but Trump use body language frequently (especially hand and head movements, facial expressions) to emphasize verbal elements accordingly. For instance, Johnson displays head movements regularly throughout his intervention, whereas Conte performs both head and hand movements to a greater extent, including gestures that are not strictly linked to the verbal content while reading his speech. His reading style is expressive and almost spontaneous. On the other hand, Trump reads out with a flat intonation, with little recourse to pauses with few exceptions, along with embedded comments, seldom looking at the audience, almost always raising his head to the left and with no hand movements as he is holding the papers placed on the lectern. It is safe to assume that the communicative situation (with or without audience in presence) also impacts on how each speech was delivered.

Finally, on a verbal level, the analysis of concordances along with the use of personal and social deixis points to a variety of patterns, which give more or less prominence to the leader (e.g., the leader as savior), the country, and the peoples they represent. Differing degrees of empathy are expressed through first person singular or plural pronouns. As in the case of Sánchez and Macron, both leaders seem to sympathize with the community by using empathic *we*, as if their discourse was the result of a collective consensus. Yet, when speaking in first person singular, the French leader appears somewhat more authoritarian than his Spanish counterpart (I decided *vs*. I inform/announce).

Although the motivations behind each leader's expression may be linked to multiple factors, including their political orientation, the analysis of how a global challenge was addressed and communicated can orient our understanding of 'languaged' identities.

Keywords: covid19 pandemic; political leaders; multimodal analysis; national identity; deixis.

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AUENITSHENAT? Indigenous identity in language debates [1]

70 Indigenous languages are spoken in Canada today (Statistics Canada, 2022)—most of which represent declining linguistic and cultural practices, with generally few speakers and disrupted intergenerational transmission. The importance of their continuing use and transmission has been established on the basis, notably, of their role in preserving Indigenous identities. French and English dominate most linguistics markets, and, as official languages, have historically been the only protected languages in Canada. In June 2019, after centuries of assimilative policies and decades of demands, the federal government adopted its first legislation aiming support for Indigenous languages across the country: *The Indigenous Languages Act* (Bill C-91). Despite an apparent consensus regarding the importance of Indigenous language protection, language debates participate in this context in the production and reproduction of colonial relations of power, notably visible in identity construction. This presentation discusses language naming as a primary mechanism of identity construction and representation in institutional discourse about languages. In Canadian policymaking and media, language naming practices reveal instrumentalization, appropriation, and resurgence, and as such contribute to both reproducing and transforming colonial relations of power in contemporary Canada.

A dataset of Canadian House of Commons discourse was constructed, focusing on the period of time during which Bill C-91 was debated. In total, these debates produced approximately 60,000 words. A second dataset (26,000 words) was built of 38 French newspaper articles from 2019, which explicitly mention Indigenous

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