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Discursive Constructions of Migrants: Verbal and Visual Images of the Other. An Introduction

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This special issue of the I-LanD Journal on “Discursive Constructions of Migrants: Verbal and Visual Images of the ‘Other’” gives a contribution to a state-of-the-art critical perspective on those debates on migration which have become central in media and politics both in Europe and the USA. The five papers presented here look at the representation of migrants in public discourse from a variety of perspectives and provide the current debate on migration within and beyond Linguistics with some original insights into the discourses of migration.

'Us' and 'Them': The Linguistic and Visual Construction of the 'Other' through Facebook Pages

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Abstract

This paper addresses the linguistic and visual representation of contemporary migration from the Third World in social, cultural and political terms through the analysis of three popular Italian Facebook pages. The analysis of the posts, conducted in November/December 2017, aims to investigate the administrators' attitude towards the welcoming of immigrants, which may influence the users' attitude (Boswell et al. 2011; Komito 2011; Volpicelli 2015; Chouliaraki/Stolic 2017). The general role of Italy in the so-called 'migrant crisis' is universally acknowledged for obvious geopolitical reasons, but it still needs to be scrutinized, especially as regards the role individuals play in the creation of public narratives and discourses of dissent/consent. In fact, it is necessary to broaden the study of how stereotypes are created and spread not only through official and national media, but also through large communities of individuals who, on one hand, exercise their freedom of speech, but who, on the other, are responsible for the stratification of populist and xeno-racist discourses that, both linguistically and visually, represent migrant people as a threat to the supposed cultural, ethnic and religious 'purity' of Italy and Europe. It is commonly agreed that social media, such as Facebook, target vast and varied audiences and that they are responsible for the spreading of both meaningful and non-meaningful information through the use of both language and images. These modes of communication are employed in an extremely connoted way, which is investigated in this paper using the interdisciplinary perspectives of both Critical Discourse Analysis and Multi modality (mainly Kress/van Leeuwen 1996, 2001; Wodak 2008; Machin/Mayr 2012; van Dijk 2015).

Keywords

migration, Facebook, stereotypes, discourse analysis, multi modality

Where Are 'They' From? A Corpus-Assisted Study of the Geographical Representation of Migrants in the UK and Italian Quality Press in 2016 and 2017

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Abstract

Brexit cannot be only an isolated case but the evidence of a greater phenomenon, namely the upsurge of populist political tendencies among European countries. Their political campaigns have transformed peoples' concerns about the increasing number of terrorist attacks and of immigrants arriving in Europe into real fear. Within this context, the press plays a decisive role in reporting and commenting on social and political issues such as migration. Hence, this study analyzes how the Italian and British press reported migration discourse before and after Brexit, focusing on the frequency of representation in the quality press and on their geographical representation identified in the use of referential strategies. This study highlights the influence of political discourse on newspaper discourse: the prominence given by politicians to migration issues has influenced its newsworthiness, it has received significantly more press coverage in 2016 and 2017 than in the past. The Italian and British press frequently represent (?) indistinctly migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers as coming from two main areas: European areas (more specifically, East Europe) and non-European areas (more specifically, Africa, Syria, and Afghanistan). The use of referential strategies to define group boundaries and to marginalize migrants in a unique group has been detected.

Keywords

cross-linguistic studies, corpus-assisted discourse analysis, migration studies, referential strategies, translation studies, cross-cultural studies

Migration and Nationalism in Italian Political Discourse on Facebook and Twitter

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Abstract

Italy underwent major changes in its demographic structure in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Foreign population rose from 1.3 million in 2001 to almost 5 million in 2014. At the same time social networks, especially Facebook and Twitter, have established themselves as a powerful means for sharing information and opinions, playing a considerable part in everyday political communication.

Nations are well-established constructions in our society, and they represent a very attractive benchmark for personal and social identification. Political speeches, media discourse and popular culture constantly reiterate the myth, culture and history of nations, reaffirming and preserving their positive image. Different forms of nationalism are in fact acquiring a renewed vigour due to some recent events that have involved Europe, namely the immigration issue and the financial crisis.

The approach of politolinguistics will be applied on the posts published on Twitter and Facebook by some of the most representative members of Italian political parties (Renzi, Salvini, Grillo) between 2014 and 2017. A series of quantitative and qualitative methods, in the tradition of corpus assisted discourse studies (Partington 2006), will be employed to analyze the way these politicians organized and presented their discourse about migration.

Keywords

discourse analysis, corpus linguistics, Facebook, Twitter, migration, nationalism.

#DACA Dialogues: Visual and Textual Analyses from Instagram and Twitter

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Abstract

In this study, by using multi modal critical discourse analysis as our approach and critical race theory and affect theory as our framework, we examined general discourse in regards to Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) across two unmonitored social media spaces, Instagram and Twitter. The data analyzed consisted of a random sample of 100 Instagram pictures (visual) and 100 tweets (lexical) that employed the DACA hashtag (#DACA) three days preceding January 21, 2018. In our analysis, several themes such as expansive and restrictive views of equality, responsibility, and culpability for the DACA crisis have emerged. We articulate that Instagram and Twitter have similarities and differences between visual and textual representations surrounding DACA.

Keywords

multi modal critical discourse analysis, critical race theory, affect theory, deferred action for childhood arrivals (DACA), Instagram, Twitter

Nomination Strategies in the Language of Right-Wing Populists: The Discursive Construction of Migrant Identity in the Political Discourse of the Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany

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Abstract

*This paper investigates the discursive construction of migrant identity in public political discourse in three European countries, i.e. the Netherlands, Belgium/Flanders, and Germany. The contrastive analysis presented here focuses on a corpus of political speeches and interviews of right-wing populists that were uploaded onto social media channels such as YouTube and Facebook between 2010 and 2017. Following a discourse-analytical approach, the paper examines what nomination strategies politicians use to refer to migrants and to conceptualize them. The politicians' strategic use of negatively connotated lexemes and various **XXXXX** and **XXX** metaphors are shown to depict migrants (i.e. the outgroup) as a threat to their own people (i.e. the ingroup), thus construing a dichotomy between 'us' and 'them'.*

Furthermore, this pilot study indicates that, in the speeches of the three rightwing populists observed, immigrants are commonly equated with Muslims, who are attributed negative qualities and intentions, and whose religion is constantly denigrated. By discussing the similarities and differences in the language use of Dutch, Flemish and German right-wing populists, this paper contributes to an understanding of how right-wing ideologies and attitudes are expressed in European political discourse, and to illustrate in what ways language can serve as a vehicle to convey subconscious mindsets.

Keywords

contrastive linguistics (Dutch, German), discourse analysis, right-wing populism, nomination strategies, metaphors