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PUBLISHER

Paolo Loffredo Editore srl
via Ugo Palermo 6
80128 Napoli - Italy
P.IVA 05014040876
R.E.A. NA 931959
+39 3248382362
www.loffredoeditore.com
paololoffredoeditore@gmail.com

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Director: **Elisabetta Donadono**

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Guest Editors' Introduction

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Răzvan Săftoiu

Transilvania University of Braşov
razvan.saftoiu@unitbv.ro

Sole Alba Zollo

University of Naples Federico II
solealba.zollo@unina.it

There is a long-standing tradition of binary or dichotomous thinking when outlining matters in terms of opposites such as good/bad, true/ false, reason/passion, religion/science, etc. Dichotomies seem to be widely used in present-day language and societies, although their use has been criticised mainly because they are associated with dominance or privilege (Elbow 1993). Even if classification is something natural and important to develop cognitive abilities, it can lead to dichotomous thinking. By contrasting two things, one implicitly creates a hierarchy based on the assumption that one of the two elements is more important than the other. This idea was central in structuralism and was later criticised (for example, Foucault and Derrida, in Robbins 2015) because there are many other nuances to be considered in between opposites (hot-cold, soft-hard, day-night, brightness-darkness). By accepting binary thinking, one risks building barriers between groups of people and determine that one group is superior to the other by spreading discrimination and prejudice towards the other group(s). Over time, societies started to classify individuals or groups of people in various forms of opposites (Black/ White, gay/straight, male/female), which are difficult to eradicate.

The Public-Private Dichotomy and Online Hate Speech: Communication Studies and Legal Perspectives

DOI: 10.26379/IL2020002_002

Susanne Sackl-Sharif

University of Music and Performing Arts Graz

susanne.sackl-sharif@kuq.ac.at

Gregor Fischer-Lessiak

University of Graz

gregor.fischer@uni-graz.at

Eva Goldgruber

FH JOANNEUM - University of Applied Sciences Graz

eva.goldgruber@fh-joanneum.at

Sonja Radkohl

FH JOANNEUM - University of Applied Sciences Graz

sonja.radkohl@fh-joanneum.at

Abstract

In the context of online communication, hate speech – discriminatory language targeting a person or group based on certain identity factors – has become one of the most urgent threats to democratic principles and freedom of expression. This paper seeks to shed new light on the disruptive force of such communication by discussing the dichotomies in which it thrives: 1. The private-public divide in spheres of action; 2. the distinction between ‘desired’ (covered by the freedom of expression) and ‘unwanted’ dissemination of thoughts (hate speech); and 3. the dichotomy of the element of power wielded by public actors (states) and private actors (platforms). The present paper is based on a comprehensive research project on online hate speech (OHS) in Austria, which includes problem-centred interviews, an online survey, as well as analyses of OHS postings, norms, and rules related to it. Within our discussions, we use an interdisciplinary approach, including the perspectives of legal and communication studies. Our research confirms the erosion of the long-standing private-public divide due to the rise of social media, which necessitates new theoretical concepts, strategies for different actors, and norms for future OHS management.

It's Only a Matter of Meaning: From English Learners (ELs) and Emergent Bilinguals (EBs) to Active Bilingual Learners/Users of English (ABLE)

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Steve Daniel Przymus

Texas Christian University
s.przymus@tcu.edu

Michael Faggella-Luby

Texas Christian University
m.faggella-luby@tcu.edu

Cecilia Silva

Texas Christian University
c.silva@tcu.edu

Abstract

Educational terms, labels, and categories can create binary thinking and societal polarisations that reify normative assumptions, status quo educational procedures, and inequitable educational experiences for culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) youth in the United States (U.S.). We address the inequitable power relations that are created by deficit-based labels for CLD students, which lead to the misperceptions and misrepresentations of their active bilingualism, and propose a new term, “active bilingual learners/users of English (ABLE)”, that centralises students’ hybrid and holistic voices in their schooling contexts. We utilise a transdisciplinary approach to 1) distinguish ABLE students’ active bilingualism from the emergent bilingualism of L1 English-speaking students who study a foreign language, 2) defend the term bilingual as a metonym for bi/ multilingual learners, 3) demonstrate through cognitive linguistics the implicit impact of placing “learners/users” before what it is they are learning/ using in a label, and 4) analyse the potential positive influence of the acronym ABLE on the educational experiences of these students. Deficit-based terms are concrete examples of dichotomy-based conceptualisation strategies that uphold normative ideologies and practices of viewing students in the United States as English-speakers vs. non-English-speakers, successful vs. unsuccessful, real Americans vs. non-citizens, and normal vs. other. In its essence, ABLE is a hybrid term that acknowledges both CLD students’ active bilingualism and their real need to develop English. Hybrid dialogues are needed to address the above conceptual dichotomies in education and transcend binary thinking that determines who is ABLE to be bilingual and successful in the U.S.

Gender Revolution in The Princess and the Frog : Prince Charming? No, Thank You!

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Emanuela Ammendola

University of Naples 'Parthenope'
emanuela-ammendola@libero.it

Abstract

This article aims to investigate the process of deconstruction and reconstruction of gender roles in the Disney animated film *The Princess and the Frog* (2009). The evolution of the main female figure in parallel with the resizing of the main male character is set out through a comparative analysis with 'classic Disney' films (see Pallant 2010) revolving around two common narrative elements: the search for true love and the happy ending. Based on these selection criteria, the Disney films *Snow White* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950), *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) and *The Little Mermaid* (1989) were compared to *The Princess and the Frog*. Seeking to draw up the evolution of female characters and gender-specific contents over time, the paper intends to offer a comparative analysis on the role that Nature plays in Disney's representation of gender in connection to the social and domestic dimensions. The second part of the article intends to explore the cooperation of verbal and nonverbal resources employed for representing gender and social roles in *The Princess and the Frog*. A multimodal approach was adopted to discuss in detail to what extent Disney animation has reshaped stories and characters to keep up with a new awareness of gender roles.

An Analysis of the Use of Inclusive Language among Italian Non-Binary Individuals: A Survey Transcending Binary Thinking

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Giuseppina Scotto Di Carlo

Università di Napoli l'Orientale

gscottodicarlo@unior.it

Abstract

This study investigates the use of gender-inclusive language among Italian non-binary individuals. In English-speaking countries, the epicene pronoun 'they' and neo-pronouns such as 'xe' and 'zim' have been adopted by nonbinary individuals and LGBTQA+ allies alike. In this debate, Romance languages are a very interesting case, since they are inflectional languages characterised by gender markers for all variable parts of speech. In Italy, activists are trying to spread language awareness to dismantle gender discrimination conveyed through language. Projects such as 'Italiano Inclusivo', 'Progetto Genderqueer', and scholars such as Gheno (2019a, 2019b) are involved in the analysis and promotion of inclusive language, while one of the most important research institutions, the Accademia della Crusca (2020), refuses to accept any alternative. It is against this background that this study analyses the state of the use of inclusive language among the Italian non-binary community. Through a survey submitted to several Italian LGBTQA+ online groups, the study investigates non-binary individuals' preferred pronouns, their selection of suffixes when writing or speaking about themselves or other non-binary individuals, how they refer to a group of mixed binary and non-binary people, and further proposals of inclusive forms. Gender-inclusive language is more than a matter of political correctness. Understanding the mechanisms behind its use is important because interpersonal communication contributes to gender stereotyping and misgendering. Even if these results are not blanket truth, they can contribute to the analysis of the connection between language, gender, and society, to overcome social polarisations and promote acknowledgement and respect.

Moscow Agents versus Ukrainian Patriots: The Polarisation of Ukrainian Political Discourse

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Ludmilla A'Beckett

University of the Free State

berchonok@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper analyzes the exposure of alleged 'Moscow agents' by selfproclaimed 'patriots' in Ukrainian public discourse. It provides an overview of the socio-cultural context of accusations of high treason and of collaboration with an aggressor-state. The analysis draws on insights from discourse historical analysis (Wodak 2001) and from investigations of antagonistic discourses (Carpentier 2017; Viola 2019; Baisha 2020). It focuses on discourse processes and scenarios invoked by this public confrontation and demonstrates that the overuse of stigmatising labels ultimately leads to changing attitudes towards these labels since the 'hunt for Kremlin agents' prompts contentious or humorous responses rather than national solidarity. The paper concludes with an overview of structural similarities and differences between discourses based on 'us' and 'them' division.

A Corpus-Based Analysis of Cosmetic Surgery Discourse: Signs of Age(ism) in the British Press

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Siria Guzzo

University of Salerno
sguzzo@unisa.it

Roxanne Holly Padley

University of Salerno
rpadley@unisa.it

Abstract

Cosmetic Surgery discourse has been scantily addressed in the literature despite encompassing elements of identity, age/ageing, gender and social context to name but a few. In this vein, the concepts of old and young as well as reasons for opting for cosmetic surgery may indeed be linked to no longer being permitted to grow old gracefully. The study combined a qualitative and quantitative discourse analysis with corpus linguistics tools to study the representation of the social variables of age and gender in the online British press within the context of cosmetic surgery. The lines of enquiry questioned how gender and age are portrayed in the British media in relation to cosmetic surgery and what a linguistic lexical analysis would reveal in terms of ideological as well as metaphorical content. The corpus under scrutiny was collected using the online platform LexisNexis using the seed words of cosmetic surgery* and plastic surgery* from four British Daily Newspapers: The Guardian, Daily Mirror, The Times and The Daily Mail. A corpus-based discourse analysis was employed to analyse the corpus. Results revealed interesting linguistic patterns in terms of cosmetic surgery representation in the British press and how cosmetic surgery is portrayed in reference to age(ism).

Moving Away from ‘Good’ vs ‘Bad’ Contradictions – ‘Sanità District’ in TripAdvisor Reviews

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Stefania D’Avanzo

Università degli Studi della Campania ‘Luigi Vanvitelli’
stefania.davanzo@unicampania.it

Abstract

A dichotomy based on ‘negative’ vs. ‘positive’ qualities applied to the famous district in Naples is usually found in media discourse due to both negative stereotypes related to this place and criminal actions and events that usually occurred there. Notwithstanding, the recovery of the huge heritage of this district since 2000 onwards due to a process of redevelopment and enhancement of its historic, artistic and human heritage has increased the positive viewpoints in the media (Catacombe di Napoli 2021). Starting from this assumption, the study is aimed at investigating TripAdvisor reviews about Sanità District from 2012 to 2019. Furthermore, a total of 92 reviews of Catacombs of San Gennaro from 2019 to 2020 have been included in the corpus. The main premise is that it is possible to find new forms of communication which may help to move beyond some traditional conflictual dichotomies (Sunstein 2007). The methodology involves a corpus-based approach along with studies on Evaluation and Appraisal (Hunston/Sinclair 2000; Stubbs 2001; Martin/White 2005; Baker 2006). The final aim is to reveal the emergence of a new evaluative language moving away the stereotyped dichotomy traditionally implicit in opinions by people from all around the world with regard to Sanità District.