

Plenary 1:

Language ideological practices online: Exploring Canada's 'two solitudes' in the digital age

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This paper explores how language ideologies are communicated through explicit and implicit means using social media, with a specific focus on the Canadian context. Canada's two official languages, English and French, have presented challenges for national unity and they have a long history as emblems of the "two solitudes" division that has plagued the country. Historically Canadian media have been employed to support the national unity project (Chartrand, 1986); however, traditional media types such as newspapers exist in parallel in English and French with little interaction between them. Therefore, while it has been possible to foster national coherence through the streamlining of some debates with the use of the media, in many cases the result has been the creation of two streams – one in English and the other in French. In other words, the medium becomes inherent to the message (McLuhan, 1964). The emergence of new media has presented opportunities to bridge the linguistic and ideological gaps, but these have also raised a host of potential issues.

In this paper, the data are compared across languages (English and French) and across media types (print news vs. online news forums and Twitter). Findings suggest that, despite the opportunities to bridge the 'two solitudes', similarities across the English-medium data stand in stark contrast to the findings from the French-medium data. Notably, English-medium national (Canadian) data often manifest language ideologies more aligned with English-medium international data than French-medium national (Canadian) data. Furthermore, there are few differences between the language ideologies communicated in news media vs. those communicated in social media. Instead, the differences lie primarily in *how* these are communicated; in other words, it is the language ideological *practices* that change rather than the language ideologies themselves. The paper thus highlights new avenues for exploring language ideologies in social media.

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Plenary 2:

Technocolonialism: Digital innovation and big data in humanitarian emergencies.

Mirca Madianou, Goldsmiths, University of London

Digital innovation and data practices are increasingly central to the humanitarian response to recent refugee and migration crises. In this article I introduce the concept of technocolonialism to capture how the convergence of digital developments with humanitarian structures and market forces reinvigorates and reshapes colonial relationships of dependency. Technocolonialism shifts the attention to the constitutive role that data and digital innovation

play in entrenching power asymmetries between refugees and aid agencies and ultimately inequalities in the global context. By reproducing the power asymmetries of humanitarianism, data and innovation practices become constitutive of humanitarian crises themselves.

Panel 1: Identity, authenticity and expertise

Self-Presentation and the Sociolinguistics of Snapchat

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The recent surge in users of Snapchat seems to suggest a radical departure from text-based mediums to more ephemeral, pictorial forms of social media. Specifically, the integration of time-limited videos and images typical of Snapchat reflects a new type of orality (Soffer 2016), more closely resembling the immediacy and transient nature of spoken language than other social media platforms. Whilst shifting trends in digital communication and the influence this has on the online identities of users has obvious implications for sociolinguistics (e.g. Androutsopoulos 2016), no research thus far has examined how users utilise the affordances of Snapchat in their everyday lives. In this paper, I discuss the preliminary findings of a year-long ethnography in a youth group in East London that explored the use of social media by adolescents. Drawing on interviews, self-recordings and over 450 Snapchat stories, I examine the ways in which the pictorial and ephemeral affordances of Snapchat are exploited by users. Whilst on the one hand, the primary affordance of Snapchat is graphical in nature, it is interesting to note that users frequently do not utilise this capacity but rather use emojis and other textual features which replicate the affordances of text-based mediums. Initially, this may suggest that the use of Snapchat may not be so radically different to other social media platforms after all. However, I argue that the appreciation of the ephemeral nature of messages typical of Snapchat, reflects a change in how social media identities are framed by this generation of users: Away from ‘memories’ (e.g. Facebook) towards ‘me in the now’. The apparent ‘reframing’ of the self, I propose, has important ramifications for how researchers interpret users’ social media identities and how these identities connect with the offline world. I conclude that a greater focus on the intersection of offline/online identities is needed to fully understand how the shift from the traditional view of new media as ‘cultural memory’ to ‘transient self-presentation’ influences and affects individuals’ use of social media.

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“Sorry about this but I’m a Brit”: Authenticity, expertise and language attitudes in online audiobook reviews

Cathleen Waters, University of Leicester

This study explores both how offline practices are expressed online (Bolander & Locher 2013) and how authenticity is evaluated in a globalized context (Lacoste et al. 2014). The data comprise written, online commentary in audiobook reviews posted on the (US) website *Audible.com* in response to British performers and/or performances of British dialects. The qualitative analysis examines reviewers’ *reactions* to the performed dialects (*not* the performances themselves).

Although audiobook recordings are scripted performances, they are parasocial in nature (Have & Pedersen 2016). It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that some of the metalanguage commentary about these performances (i.e. the online) is consistent with what has been observed for these varieties offline (e.g. by Coupland & Bishop 2007). For example, one review of an RP performance is described as “polished.” Other commenters exploit the reviews for the performance of an identity to a public audience. For example, one reviewer began with a linguistic evaluation before adding, “We are very proud of being welsh [*sic*] and we have worked very hard to keep those things that make us Welsh alive both in Wales and around the World.” These results demonstrate that audiobook reviews reproduce the offline discourses of “language regard” (Preston *to appear*), an aspect of perceptual dialectology (Niedzielski & Preston 2000).

Other metalanguage commentary in audiobook reviews is consistent with previously observed practices in other contexts, both offline and online. Some reviewers invoke experience or nationality (“I’m a Brit”) as the basis of their evaluation, a practice that has been identified previously in offline book group discussions (Peplow 2011). Others, however, include evaluations of the authenticity of the performance (“the Canadian accent sounded very off”) without stating any basis for their assessment. Thus, like other online fora, audiobook reviews allow the expression of “everyday expertise” (Eriksson & Thornborrow 2016).

From offline to online stigma resistance: Identity construction in narratives of infertile Muslim women

Fatima Alhalwachi and Lisa McEntee-Atalianis, Birkbeck College, University of London

Based within a social constructionist paradigm and anchored on constitutive studies of research on identity within sociolinguistics and communication studies, this paper uses a context based, socially oriented small story narrative analysis approach (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008) to look at how infertile Muslim women construct their identities as they blog about their infertility experience. This study is part of a larger thesis that looks at the social, cultural, religious and personal aspects of infertile Muslim women’s discursive constructions in a corpus of 411 posts from 10 bloggers, exploring how these women negotiate and position themselves in relation to others and to the master discourses available to them. The framework draws on theories of positioning (Davies and Harre 1990; Bamberg

1994, 2007; 2008) to look at the micro and macro structural forces operating on the moment-to-moment discursive act of story telling. The analysis offers a lens into the social, cultural, religious and personal aspects that emerge from and contribute to the various discursive constructions and negotiations of 'self' that those acts involve. It investigates tensions expressed in the negotiation and performance of women's identities in relation to their relevant context and to: their past and present self; the infertile community they address; and 'master narratives' around infertility and reproduction. The paper draws attention to the way bloggers use online spaces to build rapport, call for support and reappraise the social order, as they attempt to answer the 'who-am-I' question. It shows how assumptions around infertility that women report on in the 'real' social world extend to the online world, and are often maintained by women gatekeepers who are facing similar pressures of infertility.

“We are designed for this”: Doing expertise and new-born care through WhatsApp group messaging

Agnieszka Lyons and Vittoria Moresco, Queen Mary University of London

Parenthood has been discursively constructed as a mother-exclusive experience, with women represented as natural carers (Lawler, 2002; Gillies, 2007; Wall, 2010; Mackenzie, 2017). Discourses of motherhood have been both legitimised and subverted by users, who employ them to project different selves in different contexts (MacKenzie, 2017). The mobile phone could be a useful tool in building and maintaining networks of support across a range of context (Lyons and Tagg, 2016) helping new parents to maintain existing links and strengthen weak ties (Granovetter, 1973; boyd and Ellison, 2008). Taking into account the importance of social and peer support in life-changing circumstances (Xie et al, 2009), and the predominant research focus on constructing and projecting individual identities (Lopez, 2009; Mackenzie, 2017), in this talk we discuss the construction and management of *group* identities formed around shared experiences of motherhood, as enabled and supported by the affordances of the medium.

This talk draws on a corpus of over 600 screenshots of a WhatsApp group chat of first-time mums affiliated from a Greater London NCT group. Collected over a 13-month period (November 2016-December 2017), the conversations span over the period of their late pregnancies and the first year of their babies' lives.

We point to three contexts in which digital group identities are negotiated: new-born care narratives, projection of expertise, and female-as-natural-carer discourses. These are found in the group members' use of pronouns, the use of humour, and employment of multimodal and intertextual resources.

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Panel 2: Relationships in public and at work

Face work? The relational work of selfie sharing

Ruth Page, University of Birmingham

In this paper I explore the complexities of selfie-sharing practices on Snapchat and Instagram. My focus is the 'ugly selfie' and the different kinds of 'face work' that emerges from these images. The comparison of Instagram and Snapchat enables me to compare the ways in which people use their visual self-representation to interact with different kinds of publics. In Instagram, images can be shared publically, framed metalinguistically with hashtags such as #uglyselfie, and prompt responses via comments and favourites. In Snapchat, 'ugly' selfies can be sent privately as snaps to other members, are highly ephemeral and are often associated with the app's 'ugly filters'.

In line with more recent approaches to digital discourse (Blitvich and Bou Franch 2018), I argue that we cannot adequately theorise the relational work (Locher 2013) that emerges from these selfie-sharing practices as identities-in-interaction through screen-based analysis of the data alone. As scholars in the field of politeness have argued for some time, a user-based perspective is necessary to explore how the relationship between the 'self' and these 'publics' can be understood. In this paper, I report on the preliminary findings of focus group discussions which will be used as preparation for experimental research that investigates a particular kind of perlocutionary effect emerging from the 'ugly selfie': visual irony. The results of the focus group discussion point to the importance of understanding the multi-layered relationships between the online and offline contexts of selfie-sharing, where the recontextualisation of 'ugly selfies' outside Snapchat can be used in displays of relationality, akin to 'mock impoliteness' (Culpeper 2011). This kind of 'face work' (Goffman 1959) is quite different to that found in Instagram, where the public affordances of the site and its interactions impose limits on what might count as an 'ugly selfie' in the first place.

Doing close relationships over videochat

Dorottya Cserző (Cardiff University)

This paper focuses on personal use of videochat (VC) as a method of keeping in touch with loved ones at a distance. The methodology combines multimodal micro-analyses (Norris, 2004) of recorded VC sessions (6 hours in total) and an inductive analysis of follow-up interviews with the same participants as well as with additional participants (29 interviews totalling 11 hours). The different types of data are integrated by using the framework of nexus analysis (also referred to as Mediated Discourse Analysis), which holds that the affordances of a medium do not determine the actions that can be taken through it, but merely create tension between what a person wants to do and what can be done (Norris & Jones, 2005).

It has been argued that in the current state of ‘polymedia’ the moral, social, and emotional significance of the choices between media has increased (Madianou & Miller, 2013). Therefore, I demonstrate how the affordances shape VC interactions and discuss what meanings are attributed to the medium by VC users. I analyse an extract from the opening of a recorded VC and show how the participants construct the interaction as primarily social, despite the pre-negotiated purpose the VC also serves (working on a co-authored paper). Based on the interviews, I also consider which affordances are valued by users and which ones discourage them from using this medium.

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Talking a team into being in online workplace collaborations

Christina Gatti, University of Milan, and Erika Darics, Aston University

Digital communication technologies led to a revolution in how people interact at work: relying on computer-mediated communication technologies is now a must, rather than an alternative. This empirical study investigates how colleagues in a virtual team use synchronous online communication platform in the workplace. Inspired by the conceptualisation of web-based communication platforms as *tool*, *place* and *site of social construction* (Markham, 2017) we explore the discursive strategies that contribute to the construction of the team’s shared sense of purpose and identity, and consequently lead to effective collaboration. The close, interactional analyses of real-life data from a multinational workplace provide insights into the everyday communication practices of virtual team members. Our findings supplement organizational literature based on etic observations of the effectiveness of virtual work, and provide a basis for further theorisations about how communication technologies affect the ecology of and discourse practices in computer-mediated communication at work.