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Identity, Language and Diversity

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Narrating and Communicating Business 'Stories' - Multifaceted Approaches to Corporate Communication

Storytelling in Corporate Discourse – A Critical Introduction

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Everybody loves a good story. Stories are ubiquitous in our daily lives, and play key roles in all areas of human endeavour and activity. Credited with being fundamental in sense-making – "help[ing] us to make sense of what we are, where we come from, and what we want to be" (Soin/Scheytt 2006: 55) – stories are implicated in processes of personal as well as collective identity construction and display. They are also widely used to convey knowledge and values, and can be exploited as powerful framing devices to invoke audience alignment and foster persuasion – or to signal disalignment, resistance, and subversion.

Given the ubiquity, versatility, and multi-functionality of storytelling, it comes as no surprise that it has raised wide-ranging scholarly interest. Since the so-called 'narrative turn' originating in the humanities in the last decade of the past century (Smith 1981; Bruner 1987, 1991; Hyvärinen 1994, 1998; Labov/Waletsky 1997; Ryan 2005; Meretoja 2014), narrative inquiry has been used across a variety of disciplines, ranging from anthropology to psychiatry, politics, and healthcare, where storytelling has been both an object and a method of research……

One for All, All for One?
Narrating the Identities of Craft Breweries

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Abstract

This study explores the online autobiographical accounts of craft breweries in order to generate insights into how the difference-sameness corporate identity paradox is navigated within organisational stories of self. The contribution lies in furthering existing understandings within narrative approaches to corporate identity when it comes to the multiple ways in which organisations construct identities in relation to difference and sameness via their online communication. Rooted in dialogical reflexivity, insights are generated from the interplay between existing scholarship on identity within the craft brewing movement and analytic findings. The analytic findings are produced based on a narrative thematic analysis of the online autobiographies of 91 Danish craft breweries. Where existing literature suggests craft brewery identity to be constrained by three tensions (tradition-innovation, globallocal, and organisation-community), the analysis points to redefining the tensions as opportunities in corporate identity narration instead of conflicting constraints. Thus, the study highlights the ways in which craft breweries narratively construct corporate identities by actively engaging with the difference-sameness paradox rather than seeking to overcome it. By understanding the tensions related to difference and sameness, craft breweries can develop, and enhance the value of, the strategic use of stories of self.

Belgian Abbey Beers' Online Founding Stories Orienting to a Global Market

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Abstract

This study explores the construction of authentic global brand identities, by investigating the narrative strategies organisations employ in their founding stories. In particular, the focus lies on Belgian abbey beer brands, a category of beers "subject to debates and conflicts over authenticity" (Beverland et al. 2008: 3). Specifically, the online founding stories of two Trappist breweries – a category of abbey beers traditionally perceived as highly authentic – (Westmalle and Orval) are compared with the stories of two commercial abbey beers (Affligem and Grimbergen). Methodologically, a sociolinguistic, narrative analytical approach (see De Fina/Georgakopoulou 2012) is drawn upon to investigate the stories as social practices, while a multimodal discourse-analytical lens (Page 2018, 2019) is employed to study the visual and aural resources in the narratives. As the analyses illustrate, the Trappist brands pay little attention to the construction of authenticity, since their primary narrative focus lies on the presentation of their beer as an innovative, qualitative, and commercial product. Contrastively, commercial brands rely on "fact construction" (Edwards/Potter 1992) strategies to create a credible and authentic – i.e., historical, religious, traditional, and regional – brand identity, which downplays any commercial motives. Additionally, they employ a "crossfictional" (Hatavara/Mildorf 2017) frame of reference to imbue their narratives with values of self-transcendence and perseverance, thereby further enhancing their locally anchored products' participation in the global marketplace.

Carving out a Unique Brand Identity: The Big Four and their Narrative Distinctiveness

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Abstract

This study investigates corporate storytelling, and explores how four successful professional service firms, called the Big Four, leverage this discursive practice to enhance their corporate identity in progressively competitive and digitalised business environments. The nature of these firms is particularly in focus as their main marketing strategy is based on selling intangible products with a promise to effect business change. The implication is that potential clients often choose a service firm based on who they feel they can trust, suggesting that success for these corporations comes down to creating a brand that is relevant to clients, believable in its claims, and able to deliver on its promises. In particular, the study examines how the Big Four create narrative content across multiple digital media platforms and, for this purpose, a corpus of linguistic and visual data extracted from company websites and Twitter accounts is analysed by employing the theory of social semiotics and using multimodal critical discourse analysis. The data ensembles are examined with a special emphasis on how storytelling strategies are embedded in texts and images, and strategically constructed to legitimise specific social practices realised in discursive representations of each firm's identity.

"Our Transformation: Delivering a Smoke-Free Future". Corporate Responsibility Narrative in Philip Morris International's Website

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Abstract

In the last few years, Philip Morris International (PMI), the largest tobacco company in the world, has been threatened by smoking becoming less socially acceptable and the growth of the e-cigarette market due to the fact that people are more aware of the dangerous effects of nicotine on their health. In order to (re)position its brand and prevent reductions in sales, PMI has started to launch alternatives to traditional combustible cigarettes, such as heated tobacco products (HTPs), accompanied by promotional campaigns emphasising the harm reduction potential of its new products. Particularly, the company has developed diversified online communicative strategies to promote a new vision for a smoke-free future by providing less harmful alternatives to those people who are not able to quit smoking. Employing the theoretical framework of multimodal critical discourse analysis, this study aims to detect the most recurrent storytelling strategies present on PMI's website, focusing on how different modes interrelate to create a persuasive message and convey a new image of corporate identity based on social responsibility. The analysis reveals that PMI strategically employs multimodal corporate storytelling by developing the concept of "consumer well-being first" in order to rehabilitate its tarnished image and boost sales potential.

Quite Like Before: The Power of Emotional Storytelling in Coca-Cola's Campaign Open Like Never Before

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Abstract

Few multinational companies worldwide can claim to be able to equal the communicative power of Coca-Cola: every advertising and marketing device conceived by the drinks company is a masterpiece of brand image construction and promotion, and of course of corporate storytelling. One of the purposes of corporate storytelling is indeed to build consumer loyalty through brand reputation in order to implicitly reinforce people's opinions about corporate values; considering sustainability, for example, many companies are now including environmental concerns in their promotional strategies.

Coca-Cola's most recent advertising campaign, Open Like Never Before, provides an excellent yet controversial example of emotional storytelling. This paper aims to observe the characteristics of Coca Cola's strategies from the theoretical/methodological frameworks of multimodal critical discourse analysis and ecolinguistics – the "ecological analysis of discourse" (Alexander/ Stibbe 2014: 104). Drawing also from other disciplines such as social semiotics, and from theories of emotional capitalism, the present study considers both verbal and visual elements to the purpose of deconstructing the sophisticated storytelling techniques employed by Coca-Cola in the Open Like Never Before advertisement. By examining corporate reports and communications via official website and social media, the company's actual commitment to change and sustainability will also be examined so as to yield further relevant information. Ultimately, the discrepancies between the core message of positive change and the negative performances of sustainability reported by the company will be outlined, thus vouching for a multitude of intertwining research perspectives.

Job Interviews as Loci for the Promotion of Corporate Identities through Founding Stories

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Abstract

Due to the shift to the New Work Order in organisational life, testing candidates' match with the organisation's corporate identity has become increasingly important in job interviews. Yet, nowadays this sometimes also works the other way around. This is because certain segments of the labour market have shifted to a 'War for Talent' in which companies have to fight for good candidates and recruiters may attempt to reel in highly-skilled talents through the presentation of an attractive corporate identity. In this article, we particularly focus on how founding stories may help promote corporate identities by analysing recordings of authentic Flemish job interviews. Using a narrative-as-practice approach, we scrutinised the micro-discursive details of two founding stories, one from a 'regular' interview and one from a 'War for Talent'-job interview, and subsequently linked these fine-grained linguistic analyses to the larger contexts in which these interviews are situated. Overall, we demonstrated that these founding stories serve various functions, but that they both do corporate identity work. Finally, we argue that by shifting the focus from candidates to recruiters, new insights can be obtained regarding the ever-evolving job interview genre in which 'War for Talent'- recruiters are bound to increasingly engage in corporate identity work.

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Insights into Diversified Communication, Research
and Education during COVID-19: Changing Times

Introduction: Changing Discourses and Adapting Practice

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COVID-19 has brought about unprecedented change to academia, education and modes of communication. Research projects have undergone major redesign through a forced remote evolution to survive. International collaboration has the potential to be fostered in such environments generating connections beyond the academic world but building online communities is no easy feat. These online communities now aim to embrace both education and research, and inclusive provisions are needed for the dawn of the global campus, no longer an idea of the future but the reality of today (McGrath 2020b; UNESCO 2020b). This crisis is far-reaching, and the idea of 'frontline' is applicable to both eLearning as well as new modes of communication bringing many considerations for new resilient, inclusive and sustainable education and communication modes with new learning dynamics, new capacities and a new vision for such landscapes (McGrath 2020a; UNESCO 2020a, 2020b)…..

"What Slowly Kills Me and Frustrates Me is…" Study Abroad during COVID-19: Student Narratives of Space, Language Contact, and Individual Agency

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Abstract

International Student Mobility (ISM) has always been positioned as a desirable element of the student experience and is portrayed as beneficial in terms of the expansion of linguistic repertoires, increased awareness of interculturality, and the acquisition of transferable skills for long-term career prospects. However, while the opportunities for student mobility proliferated over the last three decades (Calderon 2018), ISM has been hugely disrupted by COVID-19 with many programmes pivoting to online, campuses essentially closing and restrictions placed on movement and access to spaces. While the impact of this on the number of students travelling has been negative (de Wit/Marinoni 2021), the pandemic also had repercussions for those who decided to embark on international mobility as it has affected the where, who, why, and how of interaction during the sojourn. In light of this, this study explores, from a longitudinal, narrative inquiry perspective, the experiences of eight Study Abroad/International students for whom language development was a major catalyst for participating in a student mobility programme. Previous research has highlighted that linguistic gains are often predicated on exposure to intense and diverse social interactions while abroad (Dewey et al. 2013; Baten 2020). Given the unique nature of the pandemic, the current study broadens the scope of traditional research by illuminating, following Benson (2021a), how differential interaction with physical and socially-constructed spaces impacted not only language development but also learner agency.

Remote Teaching and Learning Practices in a Heritage Language School during COVID-19: Discourse on Parent Engagement, Collaboration, and Artefacts

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Abstract

This ethnographic study explores remote teaching from a teacher perspective in a complementary community-run Finnish heritage language school in Toronto during the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020-2021. This study investigated what kind of creative collaborative learning and teaching practices emerged during the remote pedagogy and how remote learning delivers changes in the heritage language learning community. Several virtual and ethnographic data collection methods were used. The primary data consisted of written field notes based on online observations during virtual classes, written teacher reflections and semi-structured teacher interviews. Discourse analytic approach is used in the analysis of the data and theories of new materialismare also implemented. This study shows that, during this emergency, remote teaching and learning practices enabled communication and collaboration that would not have been present otherwise. Remote pedagogy also allowed families to come together to support the teachers' practices and children's language learning in a creative manner. The analysis also shows that family pets and household artefacts became useful teaching and learning material and, consequently, artefacts became a part of the pedagogic discourse, assemblage, and collaboration. Material world and the human and nonhuman participants collaborated in a shared and authentic virtual and domestic learning environment in a new manner that would not be possible in the class-room environment. This study contributes to the study of children's heritage language learning in a virtual assemblage and parents' roles in it.

Keywords

heritage school, remote language teaching, ethnography, discourse, collaboration, new materialism

Discursive Attitudes towards Immigrant Populations during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted our global community. Due to unequal socio-economic conditions and a dearth of accessibility to healthcare, immigrant communities are placed in a vulnerable position that has resulted in them being greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Following Van Dijk's theory on discourse analysis, the present study examines the discursive strategies and language forms employed by Facebook users, in order to analyse those users' perceptions of immigrant populations in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. To achieve this goal, we analyse comments from public Facebook accounts of North Carolina (United States) newspapers.
Comments were published in the weeks following January 14, 2021, when the State Department of Health and Human Services released the statement stating that the COVID-19 vaccine was accessible and free regardless of legal status and health care coverage. Results illustrate how the COVID-19 crisis has perpetuated the discourse of fear among minority immigrant populations in the U.S. In addition, immigrants continue to be blamed for the inaccessibility of the vaccine and other external structural problems. Thus, the present study sheds light on the held system of beliefs about immigrant populations during the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, it provides useful data for assessing public attitudes toward immigrant populations in times of crisis.

Keywords

COVID-19, discourse analysis, immigrant populations, attitudes, identities, social media discourse

"We've Been Through Worse": The Impacts of COVID-19 on LGBTQ+ Jewish Language in Seattle

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Abstract

This paper discusses the impact of COVID-19 on LGBTQ+ Jewish language in Seattle, Washington, focusing on the challenges and opportunities the pandemic and subsequent virtualisation produced for queer Jewish speech communities and Religious Heritage Language users. The study identified and coded prominent COVID-19-related themes in thirty-four semi-structured interviews conducted in autumn 2020 with LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ members of the Seattle Jewish community. Many queer participants, as well as cis-heterosexuals desiring to ally themselves with the LGBTQ+ community, engaged with expanded opportunities for queer Jewish community and Religious Heritage Language learning through digitised gatherings and social media, although adoption of new behaviours like including one's pronouns in one's name on video calls was mixed. Participants also incorporated extant modes of religious and cultural meaning-making, historical knowledges, and inherited trauma in interpreting the pandemic and concurrent sociological and environmental challenges of 2020. Nineteen participants described a perceived negative correlation between age and queer language use, sometimes linking this to negative correlations between age and technological literacy. Both queer and cis-heterosexual participants expressed optimism about increased intergenerational interaction effected by learning-fromhome and virtual learning. While much remains unknown, these findings suggest potential integration of creative and resilient queer Jewish adaptations to COVID-19 life and discourse into post-pandemic communities.

Keywords

LGBT linguistics, religiolinguistics, collective trauma, trauma linguistics, Jewish languages

New Practices in Academia: Moving towards Hybridity

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Abstract

Adapting academic practices at a noteworthy pace during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic has presented its challenges while also calling on pause for thought on the way in which teaching/learning and research currently take place in university contexts and the potential that is presented. Our study aims to provide a detailed comparative analysis of adapting academic practices in terms of (1) teaching/learning; (2) changes to research methodologies on a national and international scale. In line with ethnographic sociolinguistic practice, a web-based ethnographic poll was designed. The questions were specifically conceived to investigate the impact of SARSCoV- 2 at three months following the declaration of a world health pandemic on the 11th March 2020 and twelve months after the initial poll. The questionnaire investigated eight different lines of enquiry by identifying: 1. the participant cohort; 2. the pandemic phase; 3. impact on workload and identifying the types of remote activities carried out; 4. impressions of remote activities; 5. experience with online assessment; 6. analysis of methodologies for research projects; 7. adapting practice for research projects and future prospects; 8. predictions for best practice in the future.
Participation in the poll was global and results indicated that academic practices have now adopted a blended approach (96%) in line with predictions of such 12 months prior (76%). Thus, academic practices have successfully evolved through adapting methodologies and hybridity is likely the new future direction.

Spanish in Times of COVID: Lexical and Pragmatic Innovation in Spain

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Abstract

COVID-19 has drastically changed our lives in many ways that impact language use, including how we describe new concepts (neologisms), compare them to existing realities (metaphors), and interact with others (verbally and non-verbally). This study focuses on the transformative effects that the pandemic and resulting government regulations have had on the Spanish language in Spain in terms of verbal and non-verbal communication – neologisms, metaphors, and greetings, which now require more awareness, thought, and negotiation due to changes in everyday life. Drawing from discourse analysis and sociolinguistics, this article contributes to the field in its multimodal methodology and findings. Data come from 160 participants in various cities across Spain via WhatsApp (a relatively untapped resource in applied linguistics studies), semi-informal virtual interviews, and an online survey, revealing how speakers react to changes brought about by the pandemic. Through our analysis of how they refer to the virus and describe their pandemic experiences, articulate their personal COVID protocols, and navigate the speech act of greeting, we offer a window onto linguistic and cultural changes in Spain. The findings speak not only to the language-culture interface in Spain but may also offer insight into pragmatic strategies in other languages.

Keywords

Spanish, greeting, neologism, metaphor, pragmatics

Linguistic Fieldwork amid the COVID-19 Pandemic: How Social-Distancing is Affecting Data Collection

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Abstract

Linguistic fieldwork can be defined as the examination of language through the collection of primary data. This systematic investigation commonly involves observing/interviewing the speakers of the language examined in close proximity. However, with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, social distancing and social restrictions abruptly halted the traditional faceto- face fieldwork. The practice of social distancing encourages the use of online communication and thus traditional data collection has also switched to virtual fieldwork. This paper firstly reviews the role of linguistic fieldworkers before the current pandemic; secondly, it discusses the main challenges and benefits of gathering online linguistic data, taking into account online research ethics, and it reviews the use of tools which can be currently employed for online participant recruitment. We suggest that despite the challenges of carrying out virtual fieldwork (e.g. participant recruitment itself, computer-related issues, minimising the Observer's Paradox, recording quality, etc.) using online data collection can help researchers gather larger sample sizes, and that the use of emerging technologies (e.g. MTurk, Prolific, Gorilla.sc, the Twitter API package, etc.) provides high-quality online data collection, which remain in line with the standards for high-quality research.

Keywords

linguistic fieldwork, COVID-19 pandemic, data collection