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PREFACE

Since the last part of the ninetieth century the evolution of academic and working international encounters, both *vis-à-vis* and virtual, and the development of new communicative digital methods have been leading interlocutors all over the world to re-shape their ways of interacting.

By now digital practises play a relevant role in interlocutors' (non)working lives; indeed, most of everyday international communication is developed online through virtual platforms, such as email accounts, social networks, and mobile phone applications. Thanks to these electronic resources, whose accessibility is undisputed, connections among interlocutors living far away from colleagues or other communities of speakers have become easier and faster.

As an inevitable consequence, the use of a shared medium to communicate with people of different lingua-cultural backgrounds has gained central importance and speakers have increasingly felt the need to learn English, which is commonly accepted as the *lingua franca* of communication (Seidlhofer 2011). English has thus gained a leading role in numerous fields, such as medicine, business, engineering, tourism and politics. As a result, professional communication has become even more specialized in the context of use: lawyers, health-care providers, managers and tourism experts have felt the need to acquire and exploit the necessary linguistic competence to manage effective oral as well as written communication, and to become adept at using language efficiently in the additional contexts brought forward by the spread of digital communication.

As will be seen in the contributions of this issue, different environments provide the user with different affordances that in turn inform the way language is used and meaning is carried in specialized discourse use online. One aspect connecting the majority of these contributions is the adoption of a corpus linguistic perspective as either the main framework of analysis or as a starting approach upon which to build. Moreover, the peculiarities of investigating digital language raise certain challenges that the authors face in order to adjust their methodology to their datasets.

The issue opens with Francesca Bianchi's paper on the promotion of tourism on Facebook, with special reference to the use travel management companies make of language to promote their services and create a relationship with their audience. The Facebook posts of three large international travel operators based in English-speaking countries have been investigated against the background of (a) Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar (2006) (multimodal and interactive features) and (b) corpus linguistics (keywords and grammatical features). The posts show the overt presence of the tour operator as well as a greater involvement of the readers, which are treated as expert travellers.

Zooming on the language of tourism, Daniela Cesiri presents a qualitative and quantitative study of the role discourse markers (DMs) play both from a semantic and a pragmatic point of view in online texts promoting the city of Venice. Drawn on Fraser's theoretical background (2009a), DMs have been classified as "contrastive DMs", "elaborative DMs" and "inferential DMs". The study recognizes the role of DMs as "topic-orientation markers" (Fraser 2009b: 893), as they are used by tourism promoters to make the hypothetical clients believe in a tailor-made journey rather than a standardized experience.

In turn, Richard Chapman discusses projection of the self in weblog discourse on the Gaza crisis. The corpus collected by the author is drawn from a discussion page set up by *The Guardian online* in 2014. The analysis of the corpus shows that the usernames adopted by participants to the discussion carry pragmatic meaning that contextualizes the content of the message. Moreover, the use of noun phrases or full clauses as usernames emerges as a "striking feature" in naming habits, to the point that names can be classified as

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speech acts themselves, acting as markers of identity, authority and authenticity, used ironically and often involving intertextual references.

Research into the use of Powerpoint (PPT) Presentations in Academic English in the soft sciences is another facet of specialized discourses in online/multimedial interactions. Focussing on eighteen PPT presentations, Francesca Costa investigates PPT presentations created by native-speaker and non-native-speaker experts in soft sciences (specifically in the areas of psychology and pedagogy). The qualitative analysis of the data demonstrates that differences in the syntactic patterns, the lexicon included and the academic style can influence the target audience perception and comprehension of the topics under discussion.

Still within the academic world, but focussing on teaching, Sharon Hartle illustrates a gender-based approach developed for B1 Economics undergraduate students at the University of Verona, Italy. Given their future necessity to communicate in the field(s) they are focussing on during their academic path, the five pedagogical stages taken into consideration aim at improving their writing competences, focussing on their need to interact in English, specifically writing emails, in the workplace using ESP. The author concludes that the knowledge of interpersonal communication strategies and elements such as rhetorical moves or (in)formal register can deeply affect (un)effective communicative exchanges.

Moving from economics to health, Rosita Maglie studies the effectiveness of health communication online, looking specifically at Q&A websites where teenagers pose questions regarding sexual and reproductive health. Starting from the assumption that communication between healthcare practitioners and teenagers is insufficient and inadequate, three Q&A websites are investigated as examples of good practice and suitable environments for adolescents. Linguistic analysis of such websites may have real-world applications, since such insights may be useful in training healthcare professionals and informing health and education policies.

The closing paper of this issue is by Cinzia Spinzi, who analyses British politicians' speeches and press conferences (1997-2017) within the framework of conceptual metaphors combined with a discourse-based perspective. To do so, she compiles a Diplomatic Corpus (DiCo) and analyses its keywords by applying Philip's method (2012), which exploits less frequent content keywords as "potential loci for metaphorical constructions". These constructions contribute to evoking positive or negative emotions in the audience; metaphors constructed on architectural terms have been found to be so pervasive in the corpus as to convey the speaker's stance on various issues, most notably the relationship between the UK and the European Union.

Three book reviews complement the papers of the present issue, introducing the reader to three additional genres of specialized discourses. More in detail, Silvia Cacchiani reviews *Vistas of English for Specific Purposes*, edited by Stojković, Nadežda in 2015, which provides a collection of essays on the difficult task of teaching ESP in its various and specific contexts of use. Paola Maria Caleffi takes us into the realm of news discourse with Monika Bednarek and Helen Caple's *The Discourse of News Values. How News Organizations Create Newsworthiness* (2017), which focuses on the construction of the concept of newsworthiness in the ever-changing universe of digital news discourse. Finally, Erik Castello reviews *Language at Work: Analysing Language Use in Work, Education, Medical and Museum Contexts*, edited by Helen de Silva Joyce (2016), who delves into the many different contexts of use of English in the workplace.

All the contributions illustrated above testify to the variability and complexity of language use when specialized discourse crosses over to the multi-faceted realm of the Web. They also highlight how language is constantly evolving to maintain its communicative efficacy, to face new pragmatic challenges and to exploit the affordances of online contexts of use. Finally, language changes themselves constitute new challenges for ESP teaching and learning, since students and teachers alike need to master new ways of using language online. Hence, teaching, learning and research intertwine in an inextricable way, giving new sap and nutrients to the tree of language, which every day branches out and opens up to the challenges posed by its ever-new environments of use.

Works Cited

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