# BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

SPECIAL SECTION: ABSTRACTS

Brunner, Marie-Louise, Diemer, Stefan

MEANING NEGOTIATION AND CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT IN A DIGITAL BELF SETTING: A STUDY OF INSTAGRAM COMPANY INTERACTIONS

The use of communication strategies in BELF has been analyzed mainly in face-to-face and video-mediated interactions, as well as in computer-mediated communication. This study focuses on customer communication in the social network Instagram. Instagram is a key company advertising and webcare channel for companies that address an international and young customer base. In these international settings, English is the main medium of interaction. The basis for this study is a collection of Instagram posts and comments by 20 European companies from 2018. The data is analyzed qualitatively with a focus on customer engagement strategies and meaning negotiation. Customer engagement through emotional and plurilingual framing in the initial posts is comparable to rapport strategies in international teams using BELF. Culture-specific images may prompt intercultural negotiations in the comments section, engaging customers further. The use of plurilingual resources is frequent. Business-specific vocabulary is foregrounded, with both company and customers partaking in domain-specific discourse. This leads to meaning negotiation and interactive clarification strategies, which have also been documented in other BELF contexts. In sum, customer interactions on Instagram show how the intercultural and plurilingual environment is used to engage customers and create rapport, and how meaning in a business context is negotiated successfully.

Caleffi, Paola-Maria, Poppi, Franca

THE TRAINING OF BUSINESS PROFESSIONALS IN ELT MATERIALS: A FOCUS ON EMAIL WRITING

Nowadays, business organizations are faced with the challenge of operating in a global, informational, and highly networked context. The globalization of business and the fast growth in digital technology are having a massive impact both on business structures, with a proliferation of international mergers and acquisitions, and on corporate communication, as most business transactions are being carried out via digital media.

In this context, professional communication needs are rapidly changing too: not only is a common working language required, but there is also the necessity for business professionals to acquire the communicative competence that will enable them to communicate efficiently, effectively, and rapidly. As for the language, although "[i]t is undeniable that English […] has now come to represent the main common contact language and lingua franca in an interconnected globalized world" (Vettorel 2014, 1), a more encompassing conceptualization of the language of business is necessary in order to cater to the 'super-diversity' (Cogo 2012) of today's business contexts. On the communicative competence side, professionals need to acquire the ability to adjust quickly to the immediacy of the communicative event and to the dynamic nature of intercultural negotiations. This requires a vast array of pragmatic and interactional skills which have mainly been investigated in spoken interactions (e.g. Firth 1996; Björkman 2011, 2014). In business contexts, however,

transactions are often conducted via non-face-to-face media, where the lack of contextual cues may pose a barrier to effective communication (Soucek and Moser 2010).

This diachronic study of a set of ten Business-English (email)-writing texts published between 2000 and 2016 focuses on the tasks and guidelines provided for the development of email writing skills. Drawing on Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta's (2011) notion of "Global Communicative Competence," the analysis tries to establish whether there has been a change in the way the English language is presented in business ELT materials and whether provisions are made for the development of those pragmatic and interactional skills which can be of use to business professionals in the workplace.

Franceschi, Valeria

ENHANCING EXPLICITNESS IN BELF INTERACTIONS: SELF-INITIATED COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES IN THE WORKPLACE

Differences in the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of participants to ELF communication, as well as in their linguistic abilities, may pose obstacles to the accomplishment of communicative goals in international encounters (Kaur 2011, Mauranen 2006). Achieving mutual understanding requires therefore the adoption of co-operative behavior by participants to ensure the success of the interaction. In the professional context, where communicative events may be heavily task-oriented, clarity emerged as an essential feature of communicative success (Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta 2011, 255). Participants therefore make use of a number of Communication Strategies (Cogo 2009; Kaur 2009, 2011; Björkman 2011, 2014) to pre-empt and/or solve instances of misunderstanding and communication breakdown, including appeals and requests as well as other self-initiated strategies with the purpose of enhancing explicitness and therefore anticipating potential problems (Mauranen 2006, Kaur 2011). This paper will focus on a set of Communication Strategies aimed at increasing explicitness that have been attested in ELF communication, in order to identify which types occur in BELF interactions and their role in ensuring communicative success in such contexts. To this purpose, naturally-occurring BELF data drawn from business conversations and meetings in the Professional Business and Professional Organizational subsections in the VOICE corpus will be analyzed from a qualitative perspective. The outcome is expected to be in line with previous findings in different ELF context, with speakers displaying strategic competence and making use of Communication Strategies in order to get their points across while ensuring that intelligibility is maintained.

Palmer-Silveira, Juan Carlos

INTRODUCING BUSINESS PRESENTATIONS TO NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS OF ENGLISH: COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES AND INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS

For fourteen years, students enrolled in the Master Program in English Language for International Trade have had to cope with the use of English as a Lingua Franca in business settings. During this time, lecturers taking part in this program have paid attention to this important area of research from a discursive perspective, observing how students develop promotional presentations in the classroom, always considering that their audience is often formed by non-native speakers for

whom English is not their mother tongue. In many instances, companies assume that English is a necessary tool for them in order to clinch a deal with a foreign counterpart, and that only those students who are able to use it appropriately will be able to find a good job in the future, being the global language used in order to work internationally.

A business presentation is an activity that deserves our study, as presenters have to be wise enough to get the audience's attention from the very beginning. To do so they use a number of communication strategies, keeping in mind that they will probably be speaking in English in front of some other people who do not speak this language on a daily basis (Palmer-Silveira 2015). They have to understand that the message has to be concise and clear, maximizing their efforts to sound frank and truthful, and overcoming any problem that could arise regarding cultural differences between the person sending out the message and those receiving it.

In this paper, our aim is to analyse the way students introduce themselves and the company they work for to foreign customers, considering all those communication strategies followed, and paying special attention to the way they alter native-speaker norms. To do so we will analyse 81 presentations, all video-recorded in the last five editions of this master's program (2013-14/2017-18). Students were video-recorded in order to later analyse the kind of multimodal elements used while introducing their presentations. Five elements have been analysed in order to study the type of multimodal resources used by students to perform these presentations. These were a) gaze; b) gestures; c) movements; d) intonation, pace and rhythm; and e) visuals.

Results will show that most students show a clear attitude towards intercultural awareness, understanding that clarity, simplicity and some basic communication strategies can help them deliver their message more appropriately to a non-native audience. That initial part of the presentation establishes the contact between sender and receivers, and the use of adequate strategies to communicate the message will help to overcome any intercultural problem.

Pitzl, Marie-Luise

# INVESTIGATING COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE (COPS) AND TRANSIENT INTERNATIONAL GROUPS (TIGS) IN BELF CONTEXTS

Being relevant to the study of ELF more generally, the notion of Community of Practice (CoP) has been especially central to the work of some BELF scholars (e.g. Ehrenreich 2009, 2018; Cogo 2016). While many institutional business contexts in which ELF is used regularly (alongside and mixed with other languages) fit the criteria of a CoP, other (B)ELF contexts do not. Furthermore, even many existing CoPs tend to be comprised of smaller (and often more fleeting) groups and multilingual teams. To describe these smaller and less stable inter-/transcultural social clusters, recent work on ELF has proposed the notion of Transient International Groups (TIGs) (Pitzl 2018). This article will engage with characteristics of CoPs and TIGs in order to show how these two concepts complement each other with regard to BELF research. Discussing central criteria of the CoP framework and subsequently introducing key propositions of the TIGs approach, in particular concerning metadata and data analysis, the article highlights the research potential of exploring TIGs alongside more established CoPs. It is argued that working with both concepts and approaches – CoPs and TIGs – is likely to help us gain a more sophisticated understanding of the organizational and social dynamics that influence BELF communication.

Räisänen, Tiina

CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE AS A RESOURCE IN BELF INTERACTIONS: A LONGITUDINAL ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF TWO MANAGERS IN GLOBAL BUSINESS

This paper contributes to the growing field of research on English as a business lingua franca (BELF) and extends discussion on the role of culture and cultural knowledge in business interactions. It aims to provide insights into the relationship between cultural knowledge and professionals' management of BELF interactions. The paper is based on a longitudinal ethnographic study of two Finnish professionals' trajectories of socialization into global working life and their work as managers. It draws on interview data in which the research participants orient to Finnish and Chinese professional and everyday practices and differences between them and thereby display their cultural knowledge. The main aim of the paper is to investigate, using discourse analysis, how this cultural knowledge, as depicted in interviews, manifests in BELF interactions and functions as a resource for transactional and relational purposes. The findings show that cultural knowledge emerges in explicit and implicit commentary about professional and everyday practices that relate to language proficiency, understanding, interpreting, work culture, safety issues, food and business matters. The findings also show that repetition, paraphrasing, summarizing, metalanguage, local languages, directives and humour are effective resources used by the two managers at work.

Vettorel, Paola

BELF, COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES AND ELT BUSINESS MATERIALS

Communication strategies (CSs) have been shown to be an essential element of ELF, with participants cooperatively constructing communication through pragmatic moves. In BELF settings, CSs aimed at enhancing explicitness and checking comprehension are seen as an essential skill. Together with business know-how, clarity of message, explicitness and the ability to draw on plurilingual repertoires (e.g. Cogo 2016a, 2016b), they have been shown to be highly relevant in international business communication.
While the use of CSs in ELF has been looked into in teaching materials (e.g. Vettorel 2017, 2018), BELF research in this area has been less explored (e.g. Franceschi 2018; Lario de Oñate and Vázquez 2013; Caleffi and Poppi this issue; Pullin 2015). This paper aims at contributing to this area of research through the analysis of recently published Business ELT coursebooks at elementary/pre-intermediate/intermediate levels, investigating whether awareness and use of CSs are taken into account in any way, drawing mainly on Björkman's taxonomy of CSs in ELF (2014). Aspects related to the inclusion of the different layers of the Global Communicative Competence (GCC) model in the materials under examination are also looked into. Findings show that the materials under examination do not consistently acknowledge the competences that have been shown to be paramount in BELF communication, and do not regularly include CSs within a BELF perspective.

GENERAL SECTION: ABSTRACTS

Perazzini, Federica

GEOGRAPHY OF A STEREOTYPE: A COMPUTATIONAL STUDY ON THE ITALIAN PRESENCE IN THE BRITISH NINETEENTH CENTURY NOVEL

Often chosen as the privileged setting for plays, poems, and novels, Italy has been one of the core English literary imageries from the Middle Ages to the late Victorian era and beyond. However, more than an actual geographical space, the presence of Italian locations within the corpus of British literature can be configured as a distinctive discursive practice disclosing a variety of literary possibilities or, as Roland Barthes would say, a *situation d'écriture*: a writing situation based on the construction of a fictive geography capable of conveying an inexhaustible basin of themes and conventions. But what are the features at the basis of the representation of Italy as a writing situation? And is there a relationship between the use of certain Italian locations and the development of specific sub-genres within the British novel?
Using innovative computer-based tools capable of macro analysis such as topic modelling and words-cohort correlation, in the discussion that follows I will give evidence of the occurrences and the transformations of the Italian stereotype in British 19th century fiction. The aim is to investigate the changes in the relative rendition of different geographical areas within the fictional horizon of the novel thus using new empirical tools to test the correlation between space and novelistic genres.

Zinato, Susanna

THE GORGON'S HEAD: ON NARRATION, TORTURE, AND TRUTH-SEEKING IN J. M. COETZEE'S *WAITING FOR THE BARBARIANS* AND IN THE TRC'S HISTORY-WRITING AND RESTORATIVE UNDERTAKING

The article retrospectively considers the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission's main assumptions and procedures concerning truth-seeking, narration and, by implication, healing, forgiveness and reconciliation, in the problematizing light that J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) can shed upon them. The narrative choices made by Coetzee to tackle in ethically acceptable ways torture and, broadly, any inhuman authoritarian violence on the powerless victim's body are discussed by drawing on the arguments advanced in his essay "Into the Dark Chamber: The Writer and the South African State" (1986) and in the chapter "The Problem of Evil" of his novel *Elizabeth Costello* (2003). Zinato comparatively ponders on the 'hermeneutic' approaches respectively employed in their truth-seeking practices by a) Coetzee's ethically-oriented fiction, b) the perpetrator's inquisitorial torture procedures authorized by state terrorism (represented in the novel by Joll and Mandel), and c) the TRC's rules of procedure espoused in their courageous, unprecedented undertaking. In doing so, she necessarily passes through crucial issues investing the novel as much as the TRC's "staging" and recording/filing of the hearings: the relationship between torture/violence and language/narration (directly involving the novelist's responsible representation), the questioning of the healing power of post-traumatic story-telling, and of forgiveness.

Eagle, Chris

PACKHORSE PURGATORY

Deep in a remote basin of the Grand Canyon, the Havasupai Indian Reservation is one of the most isolated and poorest areas in all of North America. It also contains some of the most beautiful waterfalls in the world. With no access road in or out, its 500 residents are still supplied almost entirely by packhorses. This essay chronicles a visit I made there in December 2015, and the serious health and cultural crises I observed during conversations with local tribe members. All the Havasu wanted to learn from me about life "up top" – whether Donald Trump was really running for President, or if that was just "a show." Back in 1947, the novelist Wallace Stegner visited this very same reservation, and he wrote an article for *The Atlantic* detailing his impressions titled "Packhorse Paradise." My own essay "Packhorse Purgatory," as the title suggests, is partly a response to and an updating of Stegner's largely outdated and paternalistic impressions.

Mariani, Giorgio

ARE STEPHEN CRANE AND AMBROSE BIERCE THE INVENTORS OF THE AMERICAN "ANTI-WAR" STORY?

Drawing on premises more extensively developed elsewhere concerning the impossibility for war narratives to live up in a consistent way to their desire of delivering an anti-war lesson, the essay debates the extent to which Stephen Crane and Ambrose Bierce may be considered as the founders of a new, typically modern literary form—the anti-war story. After illustrating why such claim may be considered both valid and invalid, the essay turns to what would seem to be Bierce's most uncompromisingly shocking and critical war story he ever wrote, "Chickamauga." By intelligently playing off the deaf-mute child's perspective against the narrator's viewpoint, Bierce succeeds in de-sublimating war, puncturing the chivalric ideal with a tableau of grotesque violence. However, one must still wonder whether the shock generated by the gruesome spectacle of war may be considered as a critical appraisal of violence, or simply an emotional response that has not much to offer in terms of understanding the historical circumstances that generate violence in the first place.

Porro, Simona

THE CRISIS OF THE SOCIAL REALIST NOVEL IN THE UNITED STATES: THE "TRAGIC" CASE OF JONATHAN FRANZEN'S STRONG MOTION

Jonathan Franzen's production is characterized by a body of non-fiction writing that has greatly contributed to the heated debate about the declining relevance of the novel in contemporary America. In his controversial essay "Perchance to Dream: In the Age of Images, a Reason to Write Novels," published in 1996, Franzen acknowledged the diminished cultural role of highbrow novels in a nation dominated by consumerism, mass culture, new media and instant entertainment. In this light, the author made a public call for ambitious fiction to rise to the challenges of the late

twentieth century. Interestingly, Franzen equated such novels with the "tragic" mode: by "tragic" he meant "just about any fiction that raises more questions than it answers: anything in which conflict doesn't resolve into cant." Much of Franzen's fiction participates in the same discourse that is developed in his essayistic production, especially his early work, which is infused with large-scale social and cultural critique. His second novel in particular, *Strong Motion*, having been completed in the early 1990s, at the height of his frustration with the coeval American novel, appears of particular interest. *Strong Motion* exposes what Franzen aptly calls "the dirt" behind the American "dream of Chosenness." The novel decries the failure of a nation that, far from being a shining "City upon a Hill," has fallen prey to an unstoppable process of cultural and moral entropy that coincided with the inception of a "predatory" capitalistic system of power, which has influenced gender and social roles, the notion of progress, and the general attitude to the natural world, with the environment in particular being brutally degraded to mere infrastructure. In so doing, the book stands as an example of the author's "tragic" mode.