LANGUAGING IDENTITIES IN CHANGING TIMES
Challenges and opportunities

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Book of Abstracts

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CONSTRUCTING DISABILITY IDENTITIES
Person-first and identity-first as a case study

Introduction. This study explores how disability is represented in a purposefully built corpus of scientific articles with a diachronic corpus-assisted approach. While previous corpus-based studies have focused on disability representation in newspaper discourse, either examining disability in general (Potts et al. 2023), or focusing on one specific condition (Karaminis et al. 2023), in this study we compare two different conditions and examine how discourse practices change over time in response to evolving disability frameworks (Shakespeare 2010). There is growing recognition that discourse contributes to the construction of personal and social identity (Grue 2015). The referential expressions people use for themselves and for others carry rich socio-cultural connotations (Galinsky et al. 2003) with affective values on a continuum from negative (stigmatizing), to neutral (bias-free) to positive (affirming).

Background: person-first and identity-first language. In the domain of disability discourse there is a long-standing debate with respect to the socio-cultural meanings of two alternative linguistic referential strategies in English: whether referential expressions with adjectival premodification (*disabled* people; *blind/deaf/autistic* person) are to be preferred to post-nominal modification with a prepositional modifier and a nominal element that specifies the nature of the disability (people *with disabilities*, people *with low vision*, people w*ith hearing loss,* people *with autism*). These two referential options have come to be known as identity-first (disabled people) vs. people-first (people with disabilities) language. Proponents of both strategies are well-intentioned. Person-first language goes back to the late 1970s in an effort to use non stigmatizing language. The rationale for person-first language is to focus on personhood as the central notion, therefore not identifying a person with one of the multiple and intersectional dimensions that qualify them. Proponents of identity-first language, on the other hand, claim that pre-modifying syntax is best suited to affirm disability as essential to one's lived experience and identity. This position has been upheld by several disability scholars and disability-rights activists.

Rationale, aims and research questions. The meanings and values of the referential terms used for minority or non-dominant groups evolve over time: neutral expressions may acquire negative connotations and, conversely, negative expressions may also "flip" valence. Moreover, the linguistic shift towards viewing identity-first

language as positive, may not occur uniformly across disability conditions and socio-cultural contexts, and it crucially relies on the existence of recognized communities. Using a diachronic corpus-assisted discourse analytical approach, the aim of this study is to compare the discourse of aphasia and autism in a corpus of scientific articles. Aphasia is an acquired neurogenic language and communication disorder and is typically conceptualized as an impairment. Autism is a congenital neurodevelopmental condition, increasingly seen as a difference, not an impairment. Unlike aphasia, autism has a growing identity-affirming community within the broader neurodiversity movement. Our research questions are as follows: RQ1: Are there similarities and/or differences in the use of person-first vs. identity first language for autism vs. aphasia? RQ2. Are there evolutions over time? We expected to find differences not only in the use of referential expressions, or naming practices, but also in their discourse/evaluative prosodies.

Corpus and Methods. To answer our RQs, we compiled a purpose-built diachronic corpus spanning over a twenty-year period. We selected two comparable specialized scientific journals: *Aphasiology* and *Autism*. We randomly sampled two issues per journal per year, from January 2000 to December 2022. We included original research articles, meta-analyses, and reviews, but excluded book reviews, letters, volume summaries and thematic issues. The specialized diachronic corpus consists of 568 texts and approximately 4,107,000 running words. We performed quantitative and qualitative analyses using Sketch Engine and Wordsmith Tools 8. We computed the frequency and distribution of select search terms. For 'aphasia', these were: the prepositional phrase: *with * aphasia*, *PWA* (acronym of person/*people with aphasia*), the noun *aphasic/s,* and the adjective *aphasic.* Search terms for 'autism' were: *with * autism*, *ASD* (acronym for *autism spectrum disorder*), and the noun *autistic/s* and the adjective *autistic.* We then used word sketches and concordances to identify the collocational profile of each term.

Findings. As predicted, quantitative analyses of the frequency distributions of identity-first and person-first language revealed differences over time and across conditions. On average over the 20-year timeframe, we observed an increase of person-first language for aphasia (i.e., from aphasic to person-with-aphasia). For autism, instead, the shift was in the opposite direction, with an overall increase in the use of identity-first language (i.e., from person with autism, to autistic). A qualitative analysis of their collocational profile and patterns in their lexico-grammatical contexts also showed a meaningful shift in their discourse prosodies over time. We will further discuss the implications of these findings with respect to evolving disability frameworks, within and across different communities of practice.

Keywords: person-first; identity-first; aphasia; autism; corpus-assisted discourse studies.

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A MULTIMODAL DISCOURSE APPROACH TO THE CONSTRUCTION/EXPRESSION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY IN POLITICAL LEADERS' TELEVISED STATEMENTS AT THE OUTBREAK OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC
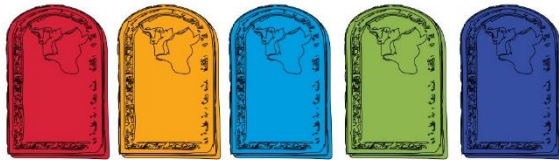
The health crisis originating from the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 forced political leaders to adopt unprecedented measures all around the world (e.g. social distancing and lockdown). To some extent, such measures went against the democratic values of Western countries, in that fundamental values such as freedom of movement were restricted. The global dimension of the problem made this "an exceptional moment" (Wahnich 2022, 17) for discourse analysis research, as top leaders (heads of states and governments) had to make swift decisions in a very short time lapse owing to the spread of the pandemic. Notwithstanding the need for global reaction, responses were managed and communicated locally. Political leaders made televised official statements (announcements and declarations) to inform all the people in the countries they represented. A few studies have already highlighted salient features of such statements, e.g., the use of war metaphors and other rhetorical devices to gain legitimacy, credibility, and authority, along with the identification of the virus as enemy (Amossy & Wahnich 2022; Berrocal *et al.* 2021).

The present study took a multimodal approach (see, for example, Di Silvestro & Venuti 2021) to the pandemic-related televised statements by five leaders (representatives of France, Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom and the USA) in their respective languages to look for evidence of national and political identity construction/expression on a visual and verbal level. The corpus consists of five statements totaling 9,000 words approximately. Although they differ in length, duration, and format, they all belong to the political textual genre and share the same subject, namely the implementation of the toughest measures adopted under the declared state of emergency. Drawing on Critical Discourse Analysis and Pragmatics,

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