Challenges in Applied Linguistics

FACULTY OF ARTS
Charles University

International online workshop

Friday, November 12, 2021

TALK 1 (9.00 – 10.00):

"Only he has the power to move me" – Determining and treating the gender bias in business communication

Oliver Niebuhr
University of Southern Denmark & AllGoodSpeakers ApS, Sønderborg

No, this talk is not about Andrew Lloyd Webber's famous solo song from Starlight Express. And yet, the talk is about being "on stage" or, more specifically, about the question of whether women are disadvantaged in business communication. The good news is that this is not always the case and, especially in Europe, this so-called "gender gap" is already relatively small. The talk summarizes the empirical phonetic research on this topic. It will be shown that the gender bias not manifests itself when we speak to each other; it only emerges when we listen to each other, i.e. in speech perception. And even then, it seems, we have to ask the right questions or ask listeners to fulfil the right task in order to bring it to light. The mean thing: the gender bias always seems to come into play when it's do or die. And on top of that it occurs where you don't expect it, for example, in digital communication via Zoom, Skype & Co. Based on the research overview, the talk ends with a few practical tips from actual presentation coaching about how both genders, but women in particular, can shape elements of their voice and intonation such as to sound more competent, self-confident and passionate, i.e. overall more charismatic "on stage".

TALK 2 (10.05 – 11.05):

Qualitative characteristics of assessing professional vs. disordered voices

Marek Frič
Academy of Performing Arts, Musical Acoustics Research Centre, Prague

Perceptual voice assessment is not only part of the description of voice disorders, but an integral part of working with the professional voice. Both of these areas work with similar characteristics. This presentation will summarize the development of the description of the

pathological voice, which has evolved from an overall assessment (7-stage UEP), to a separate assessment of basic qualities (GRBAS), to a description of voice production habits (Buffallo III), to an overall assessment of voice work and individual voice skills (VPAS, VSPP). The principles of acoustic phenomena observed in voice pathologies will be described in electroglottographic recordings, video-kymograms and spectral analysis of voice. E.g.: types of roughness, breathiness, asthenicity, strain, instability.

Professional voice work relies on effective voice production, increased loudness, voice carrying capacity, and resonance. The presentation will describe a basic insight into modern methods of working with the voice (comprehensive methods of teaching singing) and their connection to the resulting voice quality. Phenomena such as vocal onset, roughness, tenseness, register transitions become in this context an artistic mean of interpretation and, unlike the characteristics of a disordered voice, a rehearsed technical skill.

TALK 3 (11.10 – 12.10):

Reflections on the use of gender-neutral language in the context of legal translation

Anna Maria Perissutti
Università degli Studi di Udine

The talk addresses the use of gender-neutral language (a generic term covering the use of non-sexist language, inclusive language or gender-fair language) in the context of legal translation among European languages. After comparing the guidelines published by the European Parliament in 2008 about the use of gender-neutral language and the editorial rules published by the Autonomous Province of Bolzano-Südtirol (where Italian, German and Ladin are official languages and all legal texts must be translated and made comparable), we will enhance a debate on the role played by language in reflecting as well as influencing attitudes, behaviour and perceptions, and on the opportunities for legislators to take advantage of translation to enhance the use of gender-neutral language in all European languages.

At the end of the lesson, the use of the Europarl Corpus, which presents parallel versions in twenty-one European languages of the proceedings of the European Parliament, will be illustrated, using Sketch Engine, a powerful corpus analysis tool.

TALK 4 (13.30 – 14.30):

Language management theory, its scope and fields of application for systematic metalinguistic studies

Vítek Dovalil
Charles University, Faculty of Arts, Institute of German Studies, Prague

The paper provides an overview of a theoretical framework which aims at systematic analyses of metalinguistic activities of various actors. Metalinguistic activities refer to the behavior of

speakers toward language, which is designated as language management. Language Management Theory (LMT) consists of the following elements:

1) social actors involved in language-related behavior, their interests, social status, and (more or less complex) networks (micro and macro levels);

2) processual character of this behavior toward language and its specific phases;

3) interconnection of socioeconomic, communicative and linguistic levels of language management activities.

LMT provides researchers with a broad scope of possibilities in which seemingly different and theoretically heterogeneous concepts are hidden. It is revealed that the research on attitudes, language standards, language law, status of a language in international organizations or states as well as some other issues may be carried out systematically on a unified and coherent theoretical basis.

One of the methodological inconsistencies of the traditional research on standard varieties consists in overestimation of object language: drawing upon the linguistic corpora, the usage-based approach ignores most of metalinguistic activities. Such an approach also ignores the fact that norms and standard varieties represent social (= interactive) phenomena. This methodological inconsistency can be remedied if the behavior toward standard language, which is conducted by relevant agents, is analyzed systematically.

Reflecting on the corpus-based approach, I take a critical view of the usual question what is standard and complement it with the question who decides about what is standard how, in interactions with whom, in which social contexts, with which intentions, and with which consequences. Using examples from German, this approach tries to show how standard varieties are (re)shaped, which also applies to management of pluricentric standards. Thus, the dynamic nature of management processes will be foregrounded.

TALK 5 (14.35 – 15.35):

Prosody in language learning and assessment: The Common European Framework and other approaches

Dan Frost
Université Grenoble Alpes, LIDILEM, Grenoble

Oral production has been a key component of language teaching since the communicative approach, and yet the biggest problem for most learners is still speaking and understanding spontaneous speech. Assessment of oral production, traditionally considered to be the most difficult skill to assess, is inherently subjective, and many of the features we must assess are very heavily influenced by language transfer, i.e. the influence of learners' mother tongues on their production of the target language, i.e. their "foreign accent". And yet, for many practical reasons, most descriptors and assessment tools, including the CEFR, do not tackle these language-specific problems in enough detail.

Much of the research I have read has convinced me of the importance of prosody, i.e. stress and intonation, when learning languages, both for speaking intelligibly and for understanding spoken language – indeed Levis & Levis refer to stress as a "high value feature". This is particularly true for my students, as French and English have very different prosody. It also appears that effective work in the area of prosody brings results fast. To do this effectively, we need a tool to help measure prosodic features which can help students and teachers learn and assess the essential features to ensure comprehensible speech and effective comprehension.

For these reasons, we embarked on a project to create a set of descriptors which we designed and calibrated for French learners of English, which enable a detailed assessment of learners' prosody. To do this, we used a corpus consisting of oral productions compiled as part of the ELLO study. This corpus is composed of nearly 1700 video recordings of monologues and interactions made over three years of two cohorts of students. This work led to my involvement in the development of the new set of descriptors in the CEFR Companion Volume (COE 2020), which give much more prominence to prosody.

The object of this seminar is to show some of the ways research projects can develop, and feed into other projects, both research-related and practical in nature. In this seminar, I will firstly outline why prosody is so important for speaking and learning languages, then I will present some of the ways we can assess speaking skills, especially prosody. After presenting the "prosody descriptors" and how we developed them, along with the new phonological descriptors in the CEFR's Companion Volume, before concluding with some other practical applications. There will of course be time for questions, and discussion afterwards.

TALK 6 (15.40 – 16.40):

The sound of speech as a source for personality judgements

Jan Volín
Charles University, Faculty of Arts, Institute of Phonetics, Prague

The manner of talking is often more important than the actual words that people use. On a more general scale, it can be demonstrated that judgements concerning individual personality features are influenced by various speech characteristics of a talker as well. Substantial evidence has been produced by empirical research warning against both underestimating and overestimating the impact of manner of speech on the personality assessment. A significant branch of research in this area focuses on the effects of foreign accented speech. The presentation will provide an overview of the methods and achievements of the research field together with references to contributions of the Prague Institute of Phonetics.

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