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Proceedings of the VALS-ASLA conference "Applied Linguistics in the Digital Age", Neuchâtel, 12-14 February 2020

Introduction

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Triggered by the rise of digital technologies in the mid-20th century, the "digital revolution" has gathered momentum in recent years. Its current developments anticipate – and lead to – a profound upheaval of our societies, affecting professional processes as well as our daily interactions, or even teaching/learning practices in the most diverse contexts.

The aim of the biannual VALS-ASLA conference, which took place from 12 to 14 February 2020 in Neuchâtel, was to explore how research in applied linguistics can help us better understand some challenges of the digital revolution, and provide innovative solutions. Scholars addressed central social issues for our digital society. Among these, we can mention the new forms of literacy that are currently emerging under the label of "digital literacy", which have become essential to access information, or even to participate in contemporary debates. The lack of digital literacy can thus lead to the exclusion of some segments of the population. On a more general level, digitalisation is shaping new ways of thinking, acting and learning within our education systems, with fundamental implications for L1 and L2 teaching, among others. Finally, digitalisation has dramatically transformed our interactive and communicative practices, including in professional contexts; the new constraints, opportunities and dynamics characterising these interaction processes will still have to be identified and analysed in detail in the coming years.

Participants were asked to explore how applied linguistics responds to this evolution and the challenges that follow, what role linguistics can play to better understand the social and educational dimensions of this digital transformation, what new objects of study it brings to light and what new research methodologies it offers scholars. The papers presented at the Neuchâtel conference were organised around the following three axes:

1. *New technologies and communication*: How do new digital technologies transform our communicative practices and affect language?

This axis looks at both communication via new technologies (WhatsApp, Facebook, Skype, etc.) and the presence of such technologies in face-to-face communication (e.g. how the handling of a smartphone or a computer influences the interactional dynamics of a professional meeting).

2. *Learning, teaching and digital media*: What new demands does digitalisation make on our education systems, especially – but not only – in terms of digital literacy?

This second axis focuses on the opportunities of digitalisation for teaching practices, including the role of digital tools in teaching and the didactic implications that may arise, particularly in language learning and teaching.

3. *Methodological and analytical opportunities brought by digitalisation*: What are the possibilities offered by using digital media in scientific research?

This axis offers a meta-reflection on the research carried out in applied linguistics specifically and in linguistics in general, by questioning the impact of digital media on research: the study of large data corpora, the increasingly fine-tuned possibilities of processing audio and video data, and the advantages of new visualisation possibilities (for example, dynamic graphical representations, which retrace the evolution of a phenomenon through time in historical linguistics).

The proceedings of the conference, collected in this two-volume special issue of *Bulletin suisse de linguistique appliquée*, do not follow these three axes, but were ordered according to a different logic. The first volume groups papers that explore how oral and written interactions are modified in relation to different digital devices and media (mobile phones, tablets, games and video clips) (part 1). Part 2 focuses on the new practices and forms of communication induced by the Internet or Twitter.

The second volume contains contributions dealing more specifically with the design and use of language corpora for language teaching (part 1), and more broadly with the use of digital resources by both learners and teachers (part 2).

Volume 1

Part 1: Interaction

The first volume opens with the text of the plenary lecture by **Florence Oloff** (University of Oulu). After a state of the art of applied linguistics and communication studies focusing on the use of smartphones, specifically in face-to-face interactions, the article proposes a multimodal interactional analysis of two video excerpts that exemplify some interactional phenomena specific to the use of mobile phones. The author thus proposes to investigate how interactional studies provide a valuable understanding of the new social practices involved in the use of digital devices. Such research is essential to provide today's society with a more objective assessment of the role of technology in social interactions.

In the next paper, **Biagio Ursi** (Aix-Marseille University) & **Heike Baldauf-Quilliatre** (Université Lumière Lyon 2) analyse intergenerational multimodal interactions: Parents show their very young children how to play on a giant tablet, helping them complete the required tasks while teaching them to acquire the ability to perform gestures on the screen. This study is a first of its kind and explores the issues raised by this type of interaction. For example, one can highlight how parents use tactile guidance and demarcation of action space to guide children to perform the correct gesture. By focusing on the temporal aspect, the article finally shows that the analysis must consider a double temporality (that of the actions required by the game and that of the child's motor and cognitive acquisition). Such research projects should make it possible to describe in detail how the acquisition of fine gestures and specific tactile configurations is co-constructed in interaction.

Jakub Mlynář (Charles University, Prague) examines a specific situation of group interaction around the collective viewing of a video clip in the classroom: Rewatching, where participants re-watch all or part of a video they have already watched. This is one of the first studies on this phenomenon and the author analyses the functions of rewatching (resource or subject) and how these new viewings are brought about (tacitly – only through gestures – and explicitly). The ethnomethodological and conversational approach allows the author to highlight how, during re-watching, the video clips are treated as structured objects with a beginning and an end and the participants navigate through the horizontal timeline. They search for information to resolve questions that were raised after the first viewing. The present study highlights the contextualised objectification of sources such as video clips in classroom interactions.

Mireille Rodi & Thierry Geoffre (Haute école pédagogique de Fribourg) analyse the interactions of child-speech therapist dyads around *L'Orthodyssée des Gram*, an online game that aims to develop metagraphic reflection in grammatical spelling (agreement chains). They seek to highlight interaction profiles displaying the synergy between scaffolding strategies and the evolution

of metagraphic verbalisations. A corpus of 40 filmed sessions between a speech therapist and a French monolingual patient with developmental disorders of written language allows the authors to categorise the support strategies of the professionals and the metagraphic discourse of the children according to a qualitative ascending method and to show their cross evolution: continuous adaptation of the speech therapist's support and progression of the child's explanatory discourse, both being strongly correlated. On this basis, the authors are considering the introduction of the online game in ordinary classrooms and are hoping to find the same synergies at work.

Part 2: Internet, Twitter and new digital platforms

Having adapted her plenary lecture to recent momentous events, **Louise-Amélie Cougnon** (Université catholique de Louvain), collaborating here with **Louis de Viron** (Data Text SPRL), focuses on the crisis communication around COVID-19 in French-speaking Belgian tweets sent during the lockdown initiated in March 2020. To analyse the linguistic aspects of this crisis, the authors built a corpus of 100,000 tweets organised in three sub-corpora: citizen corpus, political corpus and media corpus. These data are processed from three angles: 1) the lexical creativity that accompanied the emergence of the pandemic, specifically name the disease or the new elements that resulted from it; 2) the themes addressed, which reflect the different concerns related to the disease, lock-down or the political management of the crisis; 3) the main actors highlighted in the crisis, including political figures and the media. The results obtained show both similarities with other situations and elements specific to this particular crisis.

The article by **Christian Kriele & Philipp Dreesen** (ZHAW) deals with a project to optimise the search results of a legal information platform. The project explores how linguistic phenomena influence the factors of "precision" and "recall" and how search results can be optimised using applied linguistic methods. In two sub-projects, independent solutions, one oriented towards terminology (controlled vocabulary) and the other using corpus linguistic methods ("word embedding" and collocation profiles), were developed to optimise queries. The paper concludes with a discussion of a possible synthesis of the two approaches and how its implementation in the search engine could improve users' search experience.

Cordula Meissner (Universität Innsbruck) notes that with the expansion of digital communication and information technologies, sources for multilingually oriented language teaching have become easier to access. These "digital language resources" include, for example, databases on the characteristics of the world's languages, multilingual thesauri or word lists linked to frequency and distribution. From the point of view of language teaching, their strength lies in the fact that they illustrate selected features of the language(s) and make them accessible in a concise form. They therefore offer specific opportunities for

reflection on the language(s) and the development of language awareness. Focusing on academic language and scientific propaedeutics, the article shows what opportunities digital language resources open up for multilingually oriented foreign language learning/teaching and the challenges associated with them.

In the next article, **Gianni De Nardi, Igor Matic & Felix Steiner** (ZHAW) examine what makes understanding specialised vocabulary in informed consent information more difficult for laypersons and explore some digital solutions to overcome these obstacles. Based on the observation that the basic concepts of scientific research in information texts impede understanding, the authors focus on the use of specialised vocabulary by lay people. An analysis of interactions in Internet forums shows that laymen have their own practices for using specialised vocabulary. In order to make information texts more comprehensible, the authors therefore advocate replacing experts' specialised vocabulary with variants that are more accessible to laymen, which would be systematically listed in a digital dictionary of specialised variants.

Alice Delorme Benites (ZHAW) & **Lorenza Pescia** (Institute for Advanced Study Princeton) focus on the topic of energy, which has been in the spotlight in Switzerland in recent years, particularly in the context of the popular vote on the new Federal Energy Act. Based on a qualitative analysis of the French and Italian texts of the brochure *Popular Vote of 21 mai 2017. Explanations by the Federal Council. Federal Energy Act*, they analyse the emergence of four argumentative topoi using the Swiss-AL multilingual corpus. In order to study the relationship between language and the reception of energy discourse at the local and national levels, the Swiss-AL corpus was subdivided according to the language of writing, i.e. between texts written directly in French or Italian and translated texts. This subdivision reveals linguistic characteristics that lead to questions of language policy.

Elena Gallo (Universities of Udine and Trieste - Université Paris Sorbonne Nouvelle) reports on a study analysing 15 societal advertising campaigns broadcasted in France on the Internet by ministries, private companies and NGOs between 2018 and 2019. Collected on the websites of these organisations and social networks (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, specifically), these data (videos and images) allow the author to highlight how the digital channel influences both the construction of the message and its pragmatic scope. To this end, she examines technowords appearing in these advertisements, in particular hashtags and URL links. Both are key elements in this type of communication, and they carry interdiscursivity, as well as the interactive dimension made possible by the digital medium and activated by means of proposals for concrete actions, surveys, or knowledge tests.

In her article, **Fabia Hultin Morger** (Stockholm University) examines the place and role of Internet memes in the political campaigns launched by the Swiss political group *Opération Libero*. To this end, the author assembled a collection

of 64 memes published on *Opération Libero*'s Facebook page during several referendum campaigns between February 2016 and February 2020. Their analysis, based on both multimodality theory and a historical approach to discourse, sheds light on how arguments are created between images and text and how they interact more broadly with political discourse. This study thus sheds light on how this specific phenomenon of digital election campaigns works and how it can be used as a tool for political persuasion.

Karina Frick (Universität Zürich) presents an analysis of new mourning practices emerging from digital media such as the Internet or Twitter, she looks at a typical topos of mourning interactions, speechlessness, and the way it is staged, especially in texts accompanying virtual candles and in a series of tweets related to deaths or tragic events. Thus, some hashtags take up stereotypical expressions of speechlessness (*#Sprachlos*, *#mirfehlendieWorte*), while at the same time participating in the creation of new forms of collective grief online. On the Internet, the topos of speechlessness, when it is exposed at length, is sometimes accompanied by its opposite. Finally, a corpus of press articles examines the reception of these new practices and reveals that they are criticised and considered inauthentic.

Volume 2

Part 1: corpus

The first article in this volume presents the basis of corpus-based learning. Through his focus on a French reading course, **Thomas Cobb** (UQAM) demonstrates the effectiveness and relevance of this approach to language learning and teaching, specifically for the creation of a course. Through numerous concrete examples, he presents the tools developed within the framework of this approach (here the different software available on the website www.lex Tutor.ca). The author shows how teachers can use these tools to develop a corpus of texts that are coherent in terms of level or specialised vocabulary, for example. These tools allow for the selection of appropriate documents, their possible modification, and the relevance of the final assessment test to the tasks studied during the course. The use of the various tools derived from corpus-based learning makes it possible to address questions and problems that cannot be answered by human eyes and can thus improve authentic material made available to learners.

Adopting a diachronic and panoramic approach, **Christian Surcouf & Alain Ausoni** (University of Lausanne) examine the technological history of sound recording as well as the use of recorded speech to learn and teach languages and more particularly to understand everyday oral communication. The authors cover a time span from the middle of the 19th century to the present day, with the aim of showing that even though there have long been calls for authentic

oral communication to be integrated into the learning of French as a foreign language, this has not yet happened satisfactorily, even though it is possible following the creation of oral corpora. The authors explain this lack by the insufficient emphasis placed on oral comprehension, which is attributable to a certain representation of oral language still considered through the normative vision of the written language.

In order to find out to what extent a bilingual parallel corpus can help learners of French to improve their writing skills, **Fryni Kakoyianni-Doa & Dora Loïzidou** (University of Cyprus) present the results of an experiment conducted in November 2019 with 22 Greek-speaking Cypriot students of B1-B2 level at the University of Cyprus. The students were asked to use the parallel French-Greek SOURCE Corpus to write argumentative texts. By comparing the writing of texts with simple online dictionaries, in the first instance, and with the parallel corpus in the second instance, the authors are particularly interested in the presence of modalising adverbials in the two texts produced by each student. Students were handed a list of such adverbials and asked to use them. The authors found that using the parallel corpus had a positive effect, as it had the advantage of showing the words in context. They confirm this favourable result by also relying on questionnaires completed by the learners about the tools that were used.

Using a corpus-based approach, **Hasti Noghrechi** (University of Neuchâtel) shows how to introduce verbal constructions to A1 learners of French, by answering the question of what to teach and how. A quick review of the reference books, methods and grammar books for A1 level allows the author to note that the emphasis is rather on verbal morphology and that if constructions are present, the subject is never thematized as such. Moreover, the verbs that tend to be presented first have complicated constructions, notably *être* and *avoir*. Based on criteria of affinity and frequency that she explains, the author chooses four verbs whose constructions are analysed in Emolex to find prototypical statements. She then proposes three-step didactic activities to introduce verbal constructions in the language classroom, including comparison with the mother tongue, parallel corpora and work on online platforms.

In her article, **Anita Thomas** (University of Fribourg) discusses the use of online corpora as a resource for foreign language teaching. Her study is based on an analysis of the French relative pronouns *qui* and *que* in their most basic uses. Analysis of data from L2 French learners indicates a preference for the use of *qui* with animate antecedents and *que* for inanimate ones, but there are differences depending on the task and the learners' L1. A comparison between the teaching material available on the website *Le Point du FLE* and a sample of the ScienQuest written corpus reveals a similar distribution of the two relative pronouns. The discussion focuses on the contribution of the comparison of different data sources to the development of corpus-based learning materials.

Carmen Alberdi (University of Granada) & **Carole Etienne** (ENS Lyon) note in their text that the data collected and documented by oral language specialists is rarely used in the classroom, despite the availability of pedagogical resources online. They present the CLAPI-FLE application, designed by the ICAR/LIS team in collaboration with a network of language specialists and teachers, and dedicated to the teaching of oral French, which offers some forty extracts described, transcribed, and designed in a didactic way from everyday situations, with collections and explanatory sheets. The authors aim to show the extent to which CLAPI-FLE enables learners to feel immersed in French interactions in their classrooms, whatever their knowledge or objectives. They explain the pragmatic functions and processes used by speakers during a telephone invitation and share their experience of teaching interactions in French.

Virginie André (ATILF) & **Biagio Ursi** (Aix-Marseille University) explore another digital device: FLEURON (Français Langue Etrangère Universitaire: Ressources et Outils Numériques), an online multimodal corpus which shows interactions experienced by students on and off campus. The authors propose a sequential and multimodal analysis of three excerpts of interaction where pairs of learners use the FLEURON concordancer, with the mediation of a tutor. Thanks to this multimodal corpus and its functionalities (e.g. how easy it is to get access to the wider context by a simple click), these learners manage to develop their interactional skills, skills which are often absent from language textbooks. In this way, learners discover typical phenomena of spoken language (e.g. self-repair). This exploratory study also explores how learners and teachers co-construct the learning sequence, using multimodal resources that include both linguistic elements and gestures.

Part 2: learning and teaching

Yu Kanazawa (Kwansei Gakuin University) investigates the acquisition of formulas by distant language learners (Japanese studying English). His hypothesis is that the learner's familiarity and emotionality with these formulas enables them to learn better. Thus, the author replicates a study that measured the familiarity of a list of 500 English formulas (PHRASE list) and adds a task to study their emotionality: each formula is judged by the respondents in terms of valence (very positive or very negative on a 7-point Likert scale). The results of the study are consistent with those of the first study and the validity of the familiarity values obtained is therefore reinforced. Finally, the author calls for further studies on emotionality to verify the first results obtained and to allow for the integration of these two factors in the learning and teaching of vocabulary.

According to **Mariana Fonseca & Laurent Gajo** (University of Geneva), MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) are based on digital technologies that make them not only a new medium, but also a new didactic genre. By allowing a "massive" diffusion of knowledge, these courses reexamine the languages used in the construction and diffusion of knowledge as well as their cultural

dimension (embedded knowledge). The authors want to show the tension between globalization and contextualization of knowledge that animates MOOCs, by focusing on several discursive functions (constitutive, vehicular and indexical functions). Through a multilingual perspective, they illustrate how these functions are found in MOOCs belonging to different disciplinary fields and having different working languages and subtitles. In conclusion, they discuss how technology can function not only as a tool, but also as a revealer of the complex links between discourse and knowledge.

Tanya McCarthy (Kyoto University) & **Matthew Armstrong** (Kyushu University) present and discuss a type of e-Tandem programme that was set up to promote scientific exchange and improve language and interaction skills in the academic field (poster, conference, terminology, etc.). The article introduces the chosen concept and describes the models that have been adapted by the authors. Finally, a detailed analysis of some extracts of interactions shows the problems encountered by the participants and which the programme seeks to address, but also the evolution of the participants' language skills and fluency.

Based on the observation that digital resources have become easier to access and use in L2 translation courses, **Sara Cotelli Kureth & Alain Kamber** (University of Neuchâtel) report on an action research conducted over two semesters in 2019 with female students of the University of Neuchâtel engaged in English-French and German-French translation courses. Data collected are semi-directed interviews on the representations of 26 learners in relation to the various tools and on their self-declared use, as well as recordings of practices during the end-of-term exam. The comparison of both sets of data enable to identify the criteria mentioned by users to evaluate the tools, how well they know them, the discrepancies between representation and practice, and user profiles. Based on these results, teachers should not only present the different types of digital tools, but also thematise their use.

Monica Masperi (University of Grenoble), **Triscia Biagiotti** (Institut d'Études Politiques de Grenoble) & **Sandra Canelas-Trevisi** (University of Geneva) present a didactic programme developed within the framework of the Innovalangues project for the teaching of listening comprehension in L2, in this case in Italian. This system uses video clips offering related activities to the learners. After situating their approach within the theoretical framework of social-discursive interactionism, the authors explain the criteria for video selection. They then present the characteristics of this device, which works by textual genres and types of discourse, the tools that are used to explain speech with speech and the concrete implementation of the programme, in 2019-2020 at the University of Grenoble Alpes, with learners of Italian from level B1 to C1 with different profiles. After having used the device independently, these students filled in an opinion questionnaire, the results of which are analysed by the authors.

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