

Message from the Guest Editors

Social exclusion may be approached as a more or less concerted action, situated in time and space, and executed by someone towards another part. This issue of *Language, Discourse & Society* entitled “Power and social exclusion: Insights looking at language” focuses on language as a tool for social exclusion, but also for resistance to such discrimination and oppression.

The concept of social exclusion was first used in a European setting in the 1980s, where it developed from a policy-verb used in the EU poverty programmes, to a hallmark-noun in the 1990s’ UK New Labour discourse, a process that has been described and problematised extensively elsewhere (Byrne, 2005; Silver, 1994). Within contemporary research on social exclusion there is a tendency to conceptualise exclusion as a more or less fixed, precarious position to be managed through inclusion-oriented social policy measures, for example labelling particular groups and individuals as “excluded” (Winlow & Hall, 2013). Vast academic critique has been directed towards this “weak” version of social exclusion (Veit-Wilson, 1998), as it tends to place focus on an individual level, rather than addressing structurally dictated issues of inequity and unequal distributions of power (Ward, 2009; Sahlin & Machado, 2008).

Furthermore, there is a recurring tendency to use “social exclusion” as synonymous to and interchangeable with terms such as “unemployment”, “discrimination” and “marginalisation” (Peace, 2001). This definitional unclarity is detrimental since it leads to confusion and ambiguity regarding just exactly what it is that is implied by this terminology. Used in this fluid way, social exclusion turns into a vague umbrella term that is difficult to apply in a theoretically productive manner.

In recent years, calls have been made for a more action-oriented approach towards social exclusion as a more or less concerted action, situated in time and space, and executed by someone towards another part (Davidsson & Petersson, 2017). In a similar fashion, for this issue of the RC25’s journal *Language, Discourse and Society*, rather than approaching exclusion as pre-existing condition and action, contributions were encouraged to attend to the language and discourses utilised by specific actors, located in space and time, to control, guard – or challenge – borders against the entry of unwanted individuals or groups.

This focus on language use and discourse as situated action has developed as a research strand within RC25 and in the XIXth ISA Congress that took place in Toronto in July 2018, special sessions such as *Institutional Interaction: Struggles over Knowledge and Legitimacy*¹ and *Re-Negotiating Regimes of Truth: Knowledge, Power and Social Transformation*² were organised. This thematic issue aimed at including different methodologies, such as analyses of interaction, discourse, narratives and ethnomethodology. Both qualitative and quantitative methodologies

¹ To consult the abstracts of the presentations selected for this session, organized by Marie Flinkfeldt (Uppsala University, Sweden) see the session page:

<https://isaconf.confex.com/isaconf/wc2018/webprogram/Session10641.html>

² To consult the abstracts of the presentations selected for this session, organized by Attila Krizsan (University of Turku, Finland) and Frida Petersson (University of Gothenburg, Sweden) see the session page:

<https://isaconf.confex.com/isaconf/wc2018/webprogram/Session10786.html>

were welcome. The current social, material and political challenges on global, national and local level increases the relevance of this kind of scholarly attention.

Hence, this special issue considers situations and contexts such as contemporary institutional practices and activities aiming at responsibility attribution, support, or inclusion of members of allegedly excluded and/or oppressed groups and people. Diverse institutional practices are considered, across organizations and nations, with a focus on how language use is entangled in exclusionary processes leading up to people being denied access to social, economic, material, cultural or political resources.

As it has been highlighted in ISA conferences throughout the years, demands from journals regarding writers to write in English excludes the scholars, who may be uncomfortable with this language and/or choose to publish in other language than English. Therefore, and in accordance with the linguistic policy of *Language, Discourse & Society*, this special issue contains articles written in French, Spanish as well as in English.

The first article focuses on unintended research outcomes through the preliminary interpretative analysis of 50 interviews, dedicated to English Language in Public Space; it is published in English. Anna Odrowaz-Coates underlines a connection between English language and “soft power”. Beyond the confirmation of the link between English language acquisition and the socio-economic positioning of workers according the spaces under study in Poland and Portugal, she discovers specific matrixes of language, gender and power. Using soft system methodology (SSM) and discussing what ‘soft’ may mean in social sciences, she underlines how looking at language inform about the soft power of language in social inclusion and exclusion.

In the second article, published in Spanish, Javier José García Justicia presents the critical factors that affect the processes of social exclusion in the Metropolitan Area of Monterrey, Mexico. He focuses on the accumulation of social advantages and disadvantages that may lead or enable to escape, to social exclusion. He gives special attention to the inflection points in life trajectories, which were collected using biographical interviews. The look at language relies on a detailed analysis of the biographical contents in order to identify, looking at the voices of interviewees, which are the cumulative positive or negative experiences, which may explain their current situation toward social exclusion.

The third article is published in French and look at how housing absence is named. Marjorie Lelubre investigates the categorization process of the individuals who are excluded from housing. She reminds the various categories used and underlines the difficulty to deal with both naming what is not there, and keeping the complexity of the phenomenon of being homeless. She analyses how various actors concerned by this challenge try to cope with it: the media, the social worker, and the researchers working about homelessness. She gives insights on the basis of the French speaking part of Belgium, but also shed light on naming used in France.

The fourth article is published in Spanish. Carolina Gutiérrez-Rivas implements a critical analysis of sociopragmatic aspects in letters to the President Nicolas Maduro. The ten open letters analysed were addressed online to the President by various actors (common citizens, prominent political and financial figures, and show business celebrities). Looking at the relation between language and power, she underlines both dominated and dominant discourses, and how they may indicate resistance, rejection or discontent toward the President. Her

conclusion is that not only those who oppose the head of the Venezuelan government use resistance discourse and not only his supporters use contained discourse.

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