

A Message from the Guest Editors

Language as a Reflection of Social Practices and Values

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The referential (Jakobson, 1960) or ideational (Halliday, 1985) functions of language are often said to be the most important functions and, as such, attracted the most scholarly attention, especially in semantics and pragmatics. Yet, the roles of language in (re)shaping social norms, establishing ritualized practices and creating cultural and moral values, which are often under-theorized in mainstream linguistics, are equally essential to understand language and its roles in our everyday life. Fortunately, sociolinguistics and (critical) discourse studies are attentive to these normative, social and cultural roles of language, as sociolinguists and (critical) discourse analysts often concentrate on how language (re)constructs the underpinnings holding communities together and minimizing group dysfunction. For this very reason, Trudgill (1983) points out that “because language and society are so closely linked, it is possible, in some cases, to encourage social change by directing attention towards linguistic reflections of aspects of society that one would like to see altered.”

The processes of (re)shaping social norms, establishing ritualized practices and constructing cultural and moral values can be achieved by agents aiming to create “social capitals” through the use of language across different “social fields” (Bourdieu, 1985). This of course can be instantiated across various activity types (Levinson, 1979) and by means of different text types, including media, literary and pedagogical discourses. To understand this multilayered and multifaceted interrelation between language and social life, it is imperative to focus on how different social agents in different social fields employ patterns of linguistic and interactional practices to sustain or renegotiate social hierarchies. What makes such a scholarly focus imperative is the fact that these patterns of linguistic and interactional practices can give rise to a normative and moral orders that form sets “of expectancies through which social actions and meanings are recognizable as such, and consequently open to moral evaluation” (Kádár and Haugh, 2013: 6).

More importantly, these patterns of linguistic and interactional practices can normalize the ideological biases underlying the social norms and moral and cultural values they (re)produce. In this context, Van Dijk (1998:8) alludes to the link among normativity, morality and ideology, arguing that ideology influences our conception of morality by allowing us to establish various beliefs about what is right or wrong. Such beliefs constitute the normative and moral orders of a social group and are employed to normalize the group’s cultural and social values and legitimize its interests (van Dijk, 1998: 76-77). In this sense, normalization involves the use of language to diffuse and reinforce ideologies “across various

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social fields, spaces and genres” (Krzyżanowski, 2020: 509) in ways serving social hierarchies.

Notwithstanding, normalizing social and cultural values via the use of certain patterns of linguistic and interactional practices can also be used benevolently in the context of foreign language instruction and second language acquisition. The importance of teaching the pragmatic norms of relevant communities of practice is widely recognized as one of the most important factors that develop learners’ “communicative competence” (Hymes, 1972). Familiarizing oneself with these patterns of linguistic and interactional practices is not only important to second language learners, it is equally “an important aspect of socialization for native speakers entering a new community of practice” (Couper et. al., 2016).

Therefore, the present special issue tackles how the use of patterns of linguistic and interactional practices (re)produce social norms and moral and cultural values. The structure and content of this special issue is strongly influenced by the outcome of a conference organized in March 2023 by Imam Al-Kadhumi College, Baghdad, Iraq on the topic of Language as a Reflection of Social Practices and Values. The conference provided a venue not only for discussing such important topics and identifying related challenges, but also for facilitating productive cross-fertilization from scholars interested in linguistics, literary studies, translation studies and ELT. Expectedly, the papers accepted in the conference were so diverse and large that could not be possibly included in a single journal issue. For this reason, a representative sample of accepted papers was selected, with a bias toward multidisciplinary methodological integration. The papers appearing in this special issue are those that survived the conference and journal’s rigorous peer review processes.

Despite the fact that each of the five papers appearing in this special issue stands on its own merits, an effort was made to impose a logical flow in their ordering. This special issue starts with the paper on language and migration in Norway by Meltem Yilmaz Sener, followed by Ghanim and Abed that investigate the interrelationship among language, (de)legitimization and socio-cultural identity in the journalistic field. The paper is entitled “A Socio-Cognitive Representation of Muslims in the British Quality Newspapers”. It examines how Muslims are represented in British newspapers and focuses on the selected linguistic constructs and their consequences on social representation and the construal operations in the reader’s mind. Methodologically, the paper employs a qualitative-quantitative analysis to explore how Muslims are portrayed socially in eight news articles from *The Times*, *The Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, and *The Independent*. Drawing on van Leeuwen’s (2008) and Hart’s (2010) multimodal frameworks, the paper demonstrates that the news reports contain social and cognitive discursive construction patterns that portray Muslims unfavourably in comparison to other social groups. The patterns are argued to be a reflection of ideological biases on the producers’ sides. A key result is that political conflicts in which Muslims have little involvement, e.g. gender politics and election rivalry, seem to affect the way Muslims are represented. This representation mainly revolves around the perception that Muslims pose a threat to British social values.

The third paper in this special issue is a study by Altahmazi, Jahjuh and Hussein, entitled “Constructing Common Ground in High-Context Cultures: The Case of Quranic Intertextuality”. The paper investigates how common ground is constructed in high-context cultures (Hall, 1976), with a focus on Arabic. The paper is premised on the view that

intertextual references to culturally rich and religiously significant texts often trigger presupposed contextual knowledge about social values and practices necessary for common ground construction. It adopts a mixed-method research design to test the categorization of Arabic as a high-context culture. It first develops a questionnaire to probe Arabic native speakers' perception of a number of Quranic verses/phrases that are frequently cited in everyday language use. The questionnaire identifies which of these Quranic verses/phrases can be identified as situation-bound utterances (Kecskes, 2012). Then, the Arabic Web 2018 corpus is used to identify the frequencies and analyze the concordance of the high scoring Quranic situation-bound utterances. The results of the questionnaire and the corpus linguistic analysis of frequency and concordance indicate that these Quranic SBUs form the basis of an extensive communal common ground shared by Arabic speakers, which provides empirical support to Hall's (1976) categorization of Arabic as high-context culture. From a theoretical perspective, the paper highlights the role of default or associative reasoning in processing presupposed schematic knowledge necessary for strengthening existing contextual assumptions or for drawing further inferences about the speaker's intended meaning.

The fourth paper in this special issue is a study by Shihab and Darweesh and is located within the intersection of digital media, culture, pedagogy and translation. The paper is entitled "Investigating the Difficulties of Translating Arabic Slang Hashtags into English: A Pragmatics Study". It investigates the difficulties of translating some slang Arabic hashtags into English and aims to identify solutions to the difficulties associated with the translation of Iraqi hashtags depending on situation, sociocultural connotation, and pragmatic effect. Both qualitative and quantitative samples are used in the paper to demonstrate that picking the incorrect translation technique, particularly in the absence of equivalence, is a serious challenge in translating hashtags. It is also challenging to translate a source text (ST) into the target language (TT) when it is written in colloquial and slang varieties that incorporate heavy loaded cultural connotations and serve multi-layered pragmatic effects. Accordingly, the paper distinguishes between appropriate and problematic translations and identifies possible solutions to the hashtag translation difficulties. The analysis suggests that hashtags can both minimize the effort of cognition and enhance its effects. Hence, the relevance of acceptable and appropriate translations in digital media is crucial as they communicate urgent messages to the Target Language (TL), especially in the case of hashtag campaigns, and this in itself makes (TL) users more eager to learn the purpose and genuine goal of generating the desired hashtag campaigns.

The last paper in this special issue provides a productive cross-fertilization of linguistic and literary insights to account for the different ways in which poetry can materialize and simultaneously normalize abstract universal emotions, such as love. The paper is a study by Sharhan, Oleiwi and Ganapathy that aims to investigate how literature in general and poetry in particular can reflect the social values of a society during a certain period of time. Through literary and linguistic analyses of selected modern English love poems, it shows how poets employ different linguistic resources in a highly expressive fashion to represent love not only as a universal human emotion but also as a social value associated with particular social and temporal settings. Four poems are analyzed in the paper for their literary and linguistic aspects starting with the former and using the latter to supplement it. The results of the analysis have revealed that the poets adhere to spiritual love which is infinite in terms of emotional value and temporal nature, as opposed to physical love which is emotionally lacking and ephemeral. Such a depiction of love can be clearly seen through the use of certain

literary devices and linguistic resources that are employed by the poets. The analysis pinpoints two theoretical implications. First, poetic themes and language can materialize abstract emotions, such as love, in ways that are characteristically representative of a culture or an epoch. Second, owing to its aesthetic potential and linguistic aptitude, poetry can serve as a powerful field to normalize social values.

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