Language & Emotions in the Discourse of Refugees & Migrants: A Research Agenda

1. Introduction
2. Understanding the Narratives of Distance
3. What's in the Mind?
4. Research Agenda: A Proposal

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1. Introduction
ASSESSING REALITY

A PREMISE
A PREMISE

What do we listen to when we are talking to migrants/refugees? transactional vs. interactional communication

Narration of objective vs. subjective events

It is important to listen to the narratives of refugees and migrants to understand their positive and negative emotions.

Language is the window to the mind
A VIDEO

How many passes does the team in white make?
How many passes does the team in white make?
What's in a name?
The Current Situation in the World

Current, massive displacement of populations world-wide, with the accompanying problems of adjustment, physically, economically, culturally, as well as psychologically.

How not to lose your soul when your body is crossing boundaries.

Migrants leave their home, their relatives, their friends, behind... and their names?

A TRUE STORY

When young Jacob Sementery (born March 22, 1882) arrived in the port of New York, on board the S/S “Kensington,” from Antwerp, Belgium.

On March 31, 1902, he left behind not only his native country (then Russia, now a part of Poland), but also his “native” name: he was registered (and later naturalized) as “Jake Smith.”

Migrants and refugees have to learn a new language. Cannot we learn their names, their pronunciations, their spellings...

The story of two Syrian sisters with different surnames
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2. Understanding the narratives of distance

Theoretical approaches to happiness

Corpus Pragmatics: a tool for the analysis of big data in discourse
Theoretical approaches to Happiness

Vroome and Hooghe (2013, p.1390) describe emigrants' happiness as the result of "the fulfillment of human needs, including basic physiological needs and the needs for safety, love and belonging, esteem and personal growth."

Objective: to examine human cognition and emotions from a non-arbitrary and non-ethnocentric perspective.

Same emotions realised differently according to cultures and languages


**THE ETHNOPRAGMATICS OF LANGUAGE**

Analysis of Semantic Primes and Cultural Scripts across languages: some examples

- Study of the universal notion of beauty in different languages and cultures


- Analysis of ‘sadness’ in Chinese

Corpus Pragmatics: a Tool for the Analysis of Big Data in Discourse
THE ANALYSIS OF EMOTIONS IN MIGRANTS’ NARRATIVES

AIMS OF THE STUDY

Ethnopragnmatic conceptualization of the narratives of Irish migrants in the US and their expression of happiness and sadness.

Natural Semantic Metalanguage examination of the emotional load of the positive adjectives happy and glad, and their negative counterparts, unhappy and sad.
METHODOLOGY

Corpus Pragmatics analysis of 2,106 narratives (personal letters) total: 2,005,079 words

The unit of analysis was the ‘pragmeme’: cf. a situated speech act in which the rules of language and of society combine in determining meaning.

Different contexts: family, religion, leisure, finance, friends, etc.
Positive and Negative Emotions

- Happy
- Glad
- Unhappy
- Sad

Bar Chart
What PragmemeS reflect happy and unhappy emotions?

![Graph showing positive and negative emotions across different categories: People, Context, Activities, Others. The graph displays a decline in positive and an increase in negative scores as categories move from People to Others.](image-url)
The analysis of migrants' conversations

Corpus-based investigation of 48,000 words of lingua franca English transcribed from recordings of interaction between residents of asylum-seeking centre and native-English speaking staff and amongst the residents themselves over a 3 year period.
Results

Of all the list of words, the first 300 words constitute 80% of all the vocabulary of the lingua franca.

The first 100 words account for 64% of the total words.

These results were compared with the average use of English by native speakers and with the average vocabulary of L2 teaching textbooks. Disparity.
Conclusions

The analysis of the lingua franca in this corpus shows how people who do not have access to a shared language or culture, co-construct meaning in talk-in-interaction in limited way, without communication challenges
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Current research on emotions in cognitive linguistics

Refugees flee from situations involving fear, war, terr...

Emotional reactivity is lower in a forei...
CURRENT RESEARCH ON EMOTIONS IN COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS

Recent research has found that two of the most indicative mental and physical measures of the response to fear—the dilation of the pupils and the sweating of the skin—showed a lesser effect of conditioning to fear when participants were taught in the prevailing language was the foreign language.
Refugees flee from situations involving fear: war, terror, natural disasters.

The asylum process involves a recount of their experience, with the aid of interpreters.

The narratives often cause a mental blockage when they recall their experiences.

NYT (16 March 2018) on recollections of violence suffered by Yazidi women in Canada, Interviews in Kurmanji
Emotional reactivity is lower in a foreign language, and this makes us distance ourselves with greater ease from situations loaded with emotional content when the predominant language of the environment is the foreign one.

Importance of the foreign language class to express the fears as a means to alleviate tension

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4. Research Agenda: A Proposal

1. Compile a corpus of Narratives and Interviews
2. Analyse the emotional load of war
1. Compile a corpus of Narratives and Interviews
2. Analyse the emotional load of words
3. Design tailor-made language teaching methods to alleviate traumas and foster integration
Thank You

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