

Research program:
“Representing the self and others: Socio-pragmatic traces”

Annex C

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The post-Doctoral research fellowship at issue broadens some research areas of relevance developed within the RU of Bergamo. Such areas concern the description of discourse-pragmatic phenomena in ancient and modern languages and the analysis of their use in the linguistic representation of identity in relation to the social and cultural dynamics at work, as it were, in the history of Europe.

In particular, this project is meant to investigate the linguistic representations of identity and otherness and the consequences that such representations may have on the structure of language systems (ancient as well as modern) with particular attention to results of discourse-pragmatic nature. The research, deeply anchored to the historical dimension, takes into account the synchronic effects that these results may have both on the language system and the diachronic processes through which those results are achieved.

Two lines of research will be followed:

1) The development identity markers in the history of Italian. This line of research is meant to outline a typology of linguistic strategies with a socio-pragmatic value which are used in the expression of identity and otherness within the history of Italian. The study is grounded in the theoretical assumptions of Historical Sociopragmatics (Culpeper 2011) and of Sociolinguistics of Identity (Omoniyi & Goodith 2006), and it aims to describe the linguistic means that speakers use to position themselves with respect to their interlocutors in an interactional and socio-cultural space, and what they are communicating.

Many of these means often index sociolinguistic variables which also have acquired second or third order indexicalities in certain historical and socio-cultural contexts (Silverstein 2003). Such forms are often used by speakers to represent themselves as members of societal groups (e.g. T vs V address forms in the history of Italian).

To reach these objectives an electronic corpus will be created, modeled on a similar corpus available for Latin, in which forms will be electronically tagged according to geographical, social and stylistic parameters. The corpus will enable to investigate the use and development of markers of identity both in terms of synchronic variation and of diachronic change.

2) Outcomes of discourse-pragmatic nature. This second area of research is meant to deepen the analysis of some discourse-pragmatic strategies, in particular discourse and pragmatic markers which develop also into markers of identity.

Such elements are interesting cases in point as the choice of a marker can be associated with the needs of the speakers to represent themselves as members of a particular social class (Huspek 1989) or to affiliate with different varieties of the same language (Aijmer 2009, Cuenca 2008). They can be associated with the social identities of speakers (social roles, peer groups, Andersen 2001), social relationships, textual genres (comedies, letters), social acts (requests, offers, thanks), attitudes and feelings which can vary depending on the socio-cultural reference frame (Andersen and Aijmer, 2011).

The main aim of this second line of research is to describe what linguistic forms are co-opted at the discourse-pragmatic level as identity markers in different communicative, historical and socio-cultural contexts.

The research also aims to describe the diachronic processes that characterize the development of identity markers in the history of Italian. Such processes can be characterized by both an enhancement or a loss of functional properties (pragmaticalization vs depragmaticalization).

The study intends to focus which forms develop and acquire a social value, positioning individual speakers or groups of speakers socially and culturally, i.e. pointing out their association with particular situations or situational dimensions. These values are largely dependent on socio-cultural norms that may change over time and that may, therefore, allow to retrieve information on the linguistic reality in its varied and multifaceted complexity in different stages of the history of Italian.

Finally, the research aims to investigate what types of indexicalities and social markers emerge at the pragmatic level, how they developed in the history of Italian and what relationship they have with sociolinguistic (regional, stylistic and social) variation.

The successful candidate will work on the lines of research described above, alongside other members of the RU in the development of topics of common interest. He/she will take charge of the organization and update of the web portal www.mediling.eu.

He/she will work on the creation of an electronic database, under the guidance of a supervisor, through the selection of texts, their tagging, the implementation of criteria for electronic interrogation in collaboration with technicians working on the portal.

Finally, he/she will take part in the organization of workshops and conferences planned, in cooperation with other units of the PRIN project.