



Danguaging
iversity
international conference

LANGUAGING IDENTITIES IN CHANGING TIMES

Challenges and opportunities



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Book of Abstracts

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PREFACE

Languaging Diversity is an international biennial conference of the I-Land Inter-university Research Center, an international and interdisciplinary center based at the University of Napoli L'Orientale, Italy. It welcomes scholars interested in a variety of fields such as Linguistics, Social Sciences, and the Humanities. The concepts of identity and diversity are at the core of the conference series. These are investigated cross-culturally, cross-linguistically and from interdisciplinary perspectives.

Following the seven successful events hosted by the Universities of Napoli (2013), Catania (2014), Macerata (2016), Cagliari (2017), Antwerp (2018), Teruel (2019), and Lille (2021), the eighth edition of the Languaging Diversity conference (LD2023) is organized by the University of Torino, Italy.

The present volume is a collection of extended abstracts submitted to the 8th edition of the Languaging Diversity Conference (LD2023) titled 'Languaging identities in changing times: Challenges and opportunities'. The 2023 version of the conference is jointly organised by the Department of Foreign Languages, Literature and Modern Cultures and the Department of Cultures, Politics and Society at the University of Torino, Italy.

The theme of the conference focuses on the representation and the languaging of identities against the backdrop of our rapidly changing societies. Cultures, traditions, and customs are evolving very quickly; in the same way, the interpretation of the concept of identity is undergoing a significant transformation. Languaging Diversity 2023 brings together researchers from a wide range of research disciplines and from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The contributions explore how people embrace the opportunities and overcome the challenges of current times to create a space for their identities to be acknowledged and recognized.

The book of abstracts gathers four plenary talks, four panels that include twenty presentations, seventy-two parallel presentations and six poster presentations, totaling a number of 102 talks. The abstracts discuss the conference theme in relation to gender and sexuality, ethnicity, disability, ageism, religion, ecology, medicine and science, media, politics, the law, education, and learning. The abstracts in this volume also reflect a broad range of the spectrum of theoretical and analytical approaches to study the interface between language and identity such as ethnographic, case studies, multimodal, multilingual, translational, textual and corpus-based methods.

Keywords: identity representation; identity transformation; language dynamics; Cultural dynamics; challenges and adaptation.

Conference Venue

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LOST IN GENDER PRONOUNS

Screen adaptation challenges in the TV series *And Just Like That*

This paper looks at the challenges involved with translating/adapting into Italian the dialogues of the American TV series *And Just Like That* (Darren Star, 2021-2023) by focusing in particular on the way in which the gender-neutral “they” pronoun is used. The series is a sequel to the groundbreaking series *Sex and the City* (Darren Star, 1998-2004) based on the novel by Candace Bushnell (1996). The two series, almost two decades apart, and the ways in which they are translated, hold up a perfect mirror to the way language, in particular in the Anglo-Saxon world, has changed over time; and also the difficulty for audiovisual translators in tracking those changes into their own languages and societies, which may not (yet) have adopted the same ways of thinking or expressing those ideas.

When *Sex and the City* burst onto the scene in the 1990s, it challenged many of the social mores of the decade, even in America. For the first time, women’s sexual drives were celebrated and portrayed front and centre on screen. At the time, the topic of gender identity was not a core issue in the episodes. Romance was the focus, and probably the most groundbreaking issue (back then) from a sociological perspective was the overt representation of the sexual lives of the four female protagonists. After a long pause, the sequel episodes *And Just Like That* arrive, with just two feature films catering to the series’ fans in between. These new episodes bring to the audience’s attention many of the sociological and sociolinguistic changes that have occurred in the twenty years that passed between *Sex and the City* and its sequel. *And Just Like That* is very representative of the cultural and anthropological attitudes that permeate American society today and mirrors the sociolinguistic changes that occurred throughout the years, with the introduction of non-binary pronouns and the use of singular “they”. The presence, within the series, of several non-binary characters allows the script to vibrate with ‘new stances’ and bring to the attention of the global public issues which deserve attention.

Throughout my paper I will look at the TV series *And Just Like That* highlighting passages in which gender issues are at stake, focusing on non-binary characters and reflecting on the discourse which surrounds gender identity and the role and value of the use of non-binary pronouns as related to non-binary individuals. For the purpose of my research, I will also provide other samples from other series and films, showing how translators often delete the use of the non-binary “they” in their adaptations, rendering it with binary pronouns.

The task of translators, when dealing with scripts which portray gender-neutral pronouns associated to non-binary people or used as a generic singular, is as

delicate as it is challenging. Not all languages (and the societies they serve) are developing at the same pace and this raises translational issues which need to be confronted both by professionals who translate audiovisual products and by the academic literature surrounding them. As Delabastita aptly put it, “[...] fiction has a mimetic dimension in the broad sense of referring back somehow to our understanding of reality and commenting on it” (Delabastita 2019, 190). The number of TV series, films, programmes, podcasts, etc. concerned with gender issues is rapidly and steadily increasing and Italian translators cannot neglect this emerging phenomenon anymore.

Translating dialogues and subtitles require differentiated skills and – as we shall see – Italian subtitles could find strategies to portray gender non-binarism (i.e., resorting to signs such as schwa or asterisk) but dialogues cannot rely on written signs and need to find strategies to avoid putting ‘into the binary box’ those who have striven to come out of that box. The scenario is quite slippery, and falling into heteronormative categories, as we shall see, is quite common. Turning a non-binary pronoun into a binary pronoun has an impact from many angles; it reverses the very purpose of a sentence, it takes it to a place where it did not want intentionally to be, making non-binary people feel once more “invisible or unrepresented” (Buch 2019, 1).

In the words of Buch, “Language is not finite and it adapts and morphs with society and the world’s needs. [...] Language is a living entity and is not neutral in the interpretation of reality. One must acknowledge what language is; words are complex and may be used to subjugate and harm, or build up and praise, therefore language is productive (Thorpe, 2015)” (Buch 2019: 42). In the adaptation of *And Just Like That* the translator had to confront a linguistic void, as neither the Italian language nor society has yet introduced the use of “they” as an inclusive non-gender specific pronoun. It might initially have been odd for Italians to hear “they” associated to one individual, but by making that choice, the translator has helped move forward the understanding of, and debate around, language and gender in society, demonstrating once more that translation is not just about mere transfer but also about the interplay between, and within, the words we use to describe, frame and progress our world.

Keywords: audiovisual translation; non-binary pronouns; *And Just Like That*; gender identity; singular *they*.

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