The Sociolinguistics of Contemporary Fascism

Dr. Luiz Paulo Moita-Lopes
Federal University of Rio de Janeiro

Dr. Mike Baynham

University of Leeds

Societies worldwide currently face unprecedented social unrest, in many instances tipping into fascism: not fascism as conceptualized in the 20th century, a modernist state apparatus of fascism, more a hyper-mediatized turn towards the deployments of elements and tropes of fascism in public discourse and political process: networked/distributed fascism. This contemporary shift towards fascism is emerging in "politically democratic societies but [which are] socially fascist" (Santos, 2016: 202). These include so-called "guardians of liberal democracy" such as the US. Hyper-nationalism; closing borders; internment camps at borders; "making X great again"; on-line propaganda attacking democratic practices; assaults on knowledge, universities and intellectuals; creation of a perennial state of sexual anxiety; religious fundamentalism; vilification of so called "cultural marxism" and "gender ideology"; xenophobia; construction of a continual belligerent governmental atmosphere: all these create a politics of "us and them". "Them" invokes a world in which migration has been dramatically on demand, social movements promote feminism, anti-LGBTI+phobia and anti-racism. The relevance of language in the performativity of this us versus them politics is emphatic since it has been mainly built up in the cacophony of voices in the social media. Powerful, ubiquitous and instant sources of information/disinformation, social media have been increasingly used by the alt-right to disorient, very often making it impossible to distinguish what is true from what is not in a so-called post-truth world. However, the social media have also been used as source of resistance to this world. The intricacies of the sociolinguistics behind this movement in the social media needs examination to shed light on the contemporary discursive and material construction of fascism under our very eyes. Through different sociolinguistic approaches, this panel focuses on how language indexes and performatively enacts the sociohistorical meanings which bring diverse aspects of contemporary fascist discourses and chronotopes into existence and circulates them.

Keywords: fascism, hyper-mediatized turn, us and them, information/disinformation, resistance

1. For a Sociolinguistics of Sadopopulism: Communicative strategies and counterstrategies surrounding the migration discourse in Italy

Dr. Marco Jacquemet
University of San Francisco

One consequence of European unification has been the transformation of the Mediterranean Sea into a defensive moat to stop the flow of unwanted migrants. In this techno-political moat, the communication networks of "Fortress Europe" have established, through monitoring and interception technologies (and their corresponding speech acts), a buffer zone surrounding EU territorial waters. At the same time, a grassroots movement for migrant rights has emerged as a counterpoint to these border enforcement practices. In 2018 the Italian government (composed of the populist Movimento 5 Stelle and the hard-right Lega) closed Italian ports to international rescue operations. Sadopopulist leaders constructed and broadcasted a discourse of "humanitarianism as a business," which reframed humanitarian search and rescue missions in Mediterranean waters as businesses profiteering from refugee flows. Because of this framing, 65 percent of Italians—already increasingly worried about their place in a rapidly mutating world and ready to find scapegoats in the migrants and refugees washing up on their shores—agreed with the government's xenophobic policy. But this framing was not universally accepted, and opposition coalesced in a movement that used clever mottos displayed on balcony banners and social media to poke fun at anti-immigrant politicians and to demand a more humanitarian approach to the crisis. This paper has two aims: 1) it explores the phenomenon of Italian sadopopulism (Snyder 2018) by looking at how leaders utilize mainstream and social media to frame their opposition to migration; 2) it documents how migrant rights advocates resorted to creative, nonstandard usage of Italian (including mottos that featured intransitive verbs treated as ergatives) to provide migrants with some agency and to signal the existence of a different Italy, open to linguistic impurity, communicative mutations, and cultural mixing.

Keywords: *sadopopulism, digital social media, framing, resistance, ergativity*

2. Indexing and scaling sexual anxiety as a facet of contemporary fascism in Brazil

Dr. Luiz Paulo Moita-Lopes
Federal University of Rio de Janeiro

Dr. Branca F. Fabrício
Federal University of Rio de Janeiro

Although the invocation of sexual anxiety has been fathomed as constitutive of contemporary fascist discourses in different parts of the world (Stanley, 2018; Snyder, 2018), little has been said about it in the sociolinguistics literature. In the Brazilian case, the press has observed the way president Bolsonaro has been disrespectful of the presidential office liturgy. This may be considered a moralist conjecture that does not shed light on how his appeal to sexuality enacts meanings. This kind of public performance collaborates with the creation of a fascist attitude towards difference at the same time that it discursively incites sexual desire, making as such a populist uptake possible. He insistently (often with a buffoon-like tone) re-entetualizes texts which indexicalize and perspectivize discourses about homosexuality, sexual intercourse, penis size, sexual pleasure, double meaning tropes about marriages in unexpected circumstances etc. both in his Internet frequent posts and in press interviews. Parallel to this, his government has declared a war against the so-called "gender ideology" in schools, a concern that is integral to the fundamentalist evangelical and catholic support he has received and which he continually calls forth. In this paper, we argue that sexual incitement and gender ideology discourses are indexed and scaled in his speech as part of the same sexual anxiety agenda that interweaves two apparently distant discourse domains: sex talk and religion. Both types of discourse, however, resonate with a chauvinistic and macho view in which heteronormativity and patriarchy play a central role in the government of social life. This resonation paints a normalizing authoritarian and repressive picture of who we must be as well as it produces hatred towards otherness, generating moral panic.

Keywords: *sexual anxiety, fascism, Brazil, indexicality, scale*

3. Anti-migrant hysteria, post-truth and chronotopic worlds in Trump's discourse on migration

Dr. Anna De Fina
Georgetown University

Dr. Jeremy Wegner
Georgetown University

Anti-immigrant rhetoric is one of the pillars of the far right discourses sustaining the neo-authoritarian regimes which have emerged in the last decade in countries that used to be regarded as democratic. Anti-immigrant discourses are based on post-truth, which Keane (2018) characterizes as consisting of a mix of outright lies and exaggerations, buffoonery, hair splitting and silencing. We will exemplify such post-truth discursive constructions through an examination of Trump's talk on migration. Much of the research on Trump's speech is focused on his style (see for example Sclafani 2018, Wang and Liu 2018), but we will argue instead that the effectiveness and the post-truth nature of Trump's discourse is founded on his creation and management of chronotopic worlds. We use the notion of chronotope to refer to a frame connecting space, time and identities (Blommaert & De Fina 2017). In particular, we analyze how constructions that link spatiotemporal parameters and specific identities both at a national and a transnational level are mobilized by Trump to form different and complementary chronotopic configurations. In Trump's discourse migration is presented as an immediate and concrete danger sometimes within local, precise spatiotemporal dimensions and at other times through images and tropes that form a chronotope with a transnational and vague spatial dimension: that of a world in chaos where "immigrants" are ready to invade "civilized countries" such as Sweden, the UK or even Spain. This mixing of chronotopes is crucial to creating a state of fear and confusion in the public. Data for this talk come from a set of twitter messages and videos on migration published by Trump between 2015 and 2019 which we analyze both quantitatively (through corpus linguistics methods) and qualitatively.

Keywords: *chronotopes, Trump, migrants, time, space*

4. Mediatising resistance to contemporary fascism on You Tube: voicing dissent in Brazilian rap/hip hop

Dr. Marcos Morgado
Federal University of Santa Catarina

In recent years, an on-going shift from more progressive political, social and cultural relations towards a more conservative turn around the world has been under way. A fascist political stance (Stanley, 2018) has been noted in different parts of the globe and politicians were able to gather followers dissatisfied with crumbling economies by usually making recourse to an "us versus them" discourse. Such dissatisfaction and bias have found fertile ground in social media platforms, e.g. Facebook and WhatsApp, and elevated the tensions around such issues to a level never before seen. In the 2018 presidential election in Brazil, similar tensions were fuelled by a candidate with an authoritarian, xenophobic and misoginistic discourse. More importantly, that authoritarian discourse did not go unchallenged and the same social media platforms were home for constant resistance to it such as, for instance, the movement #nothim, created by the Facebook group "Women United against Bolsonaro", and the rap/hip hop movement in Brazil, which released protest songs and a manifesto called "Rap for Democracy" on YouTube. In this paper, we focus on one music video in particular, '*Primavera Fascista'* ("Fascist Spring") to present a multimodal analysis of how resistance to that candidate's discourse was constructed. We look into visual, sound, musical and linguistic resources (Kress, 2010; Machin, 2010). Drawing upon a view of language as performative (Pennycook, 2007), we use the analytical constructs of indexicality (Blommaert, 2010), entextualization (Bauman & Briggs, 1990) and scalarity (Carr & Lempert, 2016) to show that the rap is an exhaustive discursive exercise of metapragmatic reflexivity on the performative effects of a number of fascist statements produced by the candidate.

Keywords: *discourse, fascism, social media resistance, Rap/Hip Hop, multimodality*

5. Migrant social media performances as anti-racist education

Dr. Sirpa Leppänen
University of Jyväskylä

Dr. Elina Westinen
University of Jyväskylä

Compared to many other European countries, Finland has long been ethnically and culturally homogeneous. Since 2015, it has, however, witnessed a major shift towards a more diverse society. One outcome of this has been the radical increase of fascist, racist and populist discourses – but, simultaneously, also their counter-discourses. Drawing on recent sociolinguistic and discourse analytic work on rap and belonging (Leppänen & Westinen 2017) and transformative and critical popular cultural practices in social media (Häkkinen & Leppänen 2014; Leppänen, Westinen & Kytölä 2017), and guided by the notion of heteroglossia (Bakhtin 1981), in this presentation we will focus on such a counter-discourse – social media performances by vloggers and rap artists of color.

We approach fascism as a social phenomenon, that is, as a form of political rationality that individuals and groups can express in cultural practices (Fielitz & Marcks 2019). We focus on how the poc practitioners take issue with one of its key themes: the division of people into the humanized, normative 'us' and the non-humanized, racialized 'them'. In particular, we will highlight the critical and parodic ways in which poc social media practitioners construct multi-voiced and stylized performances articulating this binary distinction in terms of (resistance to) xenophobia, victimhood, anti-intellectualism, territorialism, and the loss of order and hierarchy (Stanley 2018).

In their empowering and (self-)ironic performances, the poc practitioners do two things. Firstly, taking advantage of the racist stereotypes that the majority has about the minorities, and their shared language, Finnish, they educate the racists about their lack of investment in their own moral, intellectual and/or linguistic education. Secondly, they reverse the roles and blur the distinctions between the normative 'us' and the deviant 'them'. Thus, they are challenging the status quo in Finnish society.and ascertaining their right to 'own' Finnish as (one of) their language(s).

Keywords: *migrants, rap, vlogging, social media, performances, fascism*