



The Power(s) of Language. Negotiating Voice and Recognition

Call for Papers

Bremen-Turku-Warsaw-Stockholm-Dresden Series *Contradictory Discourses of Marginality and Demarginalizations*

BTWSD Series 2018- | #4 | June 17 and 18, 2022, at Stockholm University

Debates on language use, political correctness and identity politics seem to gain more and more attention in an increasingly polarizing society. Buzzwords such as *cancel culture*, *snowflakes*, *woke*, *white fragility*, *safe spaces* and *trigger warnings* are thrown around like bats in the political discourse while positioning both the speakers and the ones spoken of and for. The arguments mainly concern discriminatory wording, how to conceptualize equality and who is after all entitled to speak about certain issues. In other words: who is gaining authority over certain representations by having a credible voice? And on what basis can we justify the decision to speak for others (Alcoff 1991)? The question of who “owns” language, it seems, lies at the core of discursive social polarization in Europe and the US today. It stands in close relationship to issues of rights and freedom in a democratic society, as different sides in the debates claim similar ideals in their arguments: equal rights and opportunities as well as protection against discrimination on the grounds of gender, ethnicity, sexuality and religion, and the right to exert freedom of speech.

At the same time there are continuing discursive struggles for the position of the marginalized as asserted privileged groups claim to be oppressed and refuse to see discrimination as a complex, interconnected system but instead frame it as isolated acts committed by individual people. The growing inequality of recent decades has framed a society of winners and losers

instead of solidarity and seeking a shared common good beyond the competition to rise (Sandel 2020, 15). William Davies (2021) observes a momentum for the politics of recognition where identity politics “is denounced for depriving white men, the working class or the nation-state the recognition that is rightly theirs” (85). In the US, Trump supporters consequently expressed fear by the prospect of becoming “strangers in their own land” (Hochschild 2016), a claim that, in and of itself, strongly bears on identity politics. We can see how political confrontations in contexts such as Brexit, the US elections or protests against pandemic measures contain a number of demands for identity recognition. Of course, this is not new, the quest for recognition is, according to Charles Taylor, connected to the 18th-century emergence of individualized identities. In Critical Theory the concept of recognition gained new attention in the dialogue of Axel Honneth and Nancy Fraser beginning in the early 90s (Fraser 1995; 2000; Honneth 1995; Fraser & Honneth 2003). The rising inequality of recent decades has also changed the terms of social recognition and esteem (Sandel 2020, 22).

Discussions about identity politics and its possible consequences are not new either. The Combahee River Collective Statement (1977) might be the first articulation of the concept of multiple oppressions in terms of identity politics: “We believe that the most profound and potentially most radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else’s oppression” (19). It is highly interesting that the authors, despite emphasizing interdependent structures in the major system of oppression, also take into account a possible fractionalization as a counterforce to solidarity. The particular and specialized demands of various interest groups that define today’s political discourse have led to a fragmentation in the struggle for rights which is also used by the right “as a way of satirizing and sabotaging all discourses of social justice” (Davies 2021, 85).

As part of the conference series *Contradictory Discourses of Marginality and Demarginalizations* (BTWSD Series 2018-2023)* the next and fourth conference in Stockholm (June 17 and 18 2022) addresses discursive struggles for voice and recognition from an interdisciplinary perspective and welcomes papers on various topics related to the above-described issues. The conference aims to open up a critical dialogue in which we can explore the role and power(s) of language in these highly contested discourses. Language should by no means be understood in an essentialist way; rather, we welcome contributions

that discuss different conceptualizations and implications of language and its power structures. It will also be of great importance how we (re)position ourselves and our research in a discourse in which we are entangled to a high degree. We are interested in theoretical considerations between language, ideologies and identities in contemporary as well as historical case studies. Against this backdrop, we invite contributions that critically engage with the following (but not exclusively) questions:

- How is polarization used for self-positioning in the current discourses addressed above?
- What argumentation patterns are evident in such antagonistic discourses?
- What forms and functions of ambivalent positioning by political actors shape current discourses?
- What kind of claims for a credible and authentic voice can we recognize?
- In which discourses is marginality particularly relevant?
- When and how are claims of marginalized positions and positioning used strategically by individuals and groups for themselves or for others to gain rights, power, status or resources?
- Who authorizes whom and themselves in these discourses as an instance of recontextualization?
- How are demands for recognition or concepts of misrecognition expressed?
- How have discourses about the use of language and taboos changed over time?

The organisers approach these topics from an interdisciplinary linguistic and cultural studies perspective and wish to invite researchers from all disciplines to contribute to disciplinary and interdisciplinary discussions. Not only linguists, but also historians, sociologists, philosophers, anthropologists, psychologists, educational, media and social scientists, literary and cultural studies scholars, scholars of law as well as artists and journalists are welcome to provide their contribution to our conference. The conference program will include presentations, panel discussions and more informal formats such as world cafe. Students and doctoral students are equally welcome with contributions or to participate. The languages of the conference are English and German, discussions will be held in English. Please send your paper title, abstracts

(max 300 words) and a short biographical note as one PDF file to charlotta.brylla@tyska.su.se no later than **December 15, 2021**. Successful applicants will be notified by **January 15, 2021**.

Please indicate whether your institution will be able to cover your expenses or whether your participation depends on external funds. We will be trying to secure funding for the conference; however, we will only be able to inform you if we have the possibility to cover travel and accommodation costs at a later state. There will be no registration fee.

Stockholm – Bremen – Turku – Warsaw – Dresden, October 2021

Charlotta Seiler Brylla – Ingo H. Warnke – Hanna Acke – Silvia Bonacchi – Carsten Junker

* A European research network at the University of Bremen, Åbo Akademi University (in Åbo/Turku), University of Warsaw, Stockholm University and TU Dresden address questions of social positions and positioning in a conference series on contradictory discourses of marginality and demarginalizations. While our first conference in Bremen dealt with Queer contradictions – contradictory scenarios of discursive positions and positioning of marginality beyond heteronormative life plans, the topic of the second conference in Turku was marginality and centrality in contradictory discourses of religious and national belonging. Our latest conference in Warsaw, spring 2021, focused on positions and positioning of vulnerability in emerging discourses and in conversational exchanges. Social positions and positioning stand in connection to linguistic practices of stance taking and staging, of making oneself heard. Questions of marginal or central membership in groups and mechanisms of belonging have a high significance in constituting voices of actors in emerging discourses. In these processes of positioning in the sense of stance taking and/or staging, contradictory discursive figurations become visible which often represent a challenge for modern democratic societies. The goal of the conference series is to reach an understanding of contemporary discourses shaped by contradictory configurations through in-depth analysis.

Literature

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