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13th International Conference Diskurs – Interdisziplinär | DI 13

(Self)Care in Discourse

October 17th-19th 2024, University of Warsaw

The 13th conference of the international network Diskurs Interdisziplinär (DI 13) will be dedicated to *(self)care* in microsocial and macrosocial discourses, in a thematic continuity with the two previous conferences on *Discourse linguistics beyond Big Data* (DI 11, IDS Mannheim) and *Discourses off/in disruption* (DI 12, TU Dresden).

Considering discourse analysis as social analysis and discourses as factors and indicators of social negotiations, we believe that the recent increased attention to the issue of *care* is an expression of an important societal change about the way that responsibility of individuals, groups, and institutions in the *res publica* is conceived, of speaking and acting for participation, and of understanding commitment to socially weaker groups or individuals.

The theme of *care* arises as transversal to multiple discourses, from private discourses (e.g. family micro-discourses) to public debates in the media (e.g. on global political issues). What is interesting from the perspective of linguistic analysis is that in care discourses, various discursive traditions overlap, in some cases enhancing, in others confronting and even contradicting each other (Warnke and Acke 2018).

As conceptual legacy, the idea of care is rooted in the acknowledgement of a tension between principles of universal morality, which assume a universal sense of equality, and a relation-based, “care”-based moral thought which fosters a social behaviour (a moral duty) of commitment to act on behalf of Others (Gilligan 1986). Many scholars (see, e.g., Held 2005, Hooymann and Gonyea 1995) consider this tension as a gender-specific opposition between two paradigms and two different models of action in society, the first founded on patriarchy and the latter founded on alternative female logics (Gregory 2000, 447) which consider vulnerable groups as groups to take care of as a moral duty.

In recent discursive formations, the term *care* is essentially interpreted in two directions: as 1) *care for Others* and as 2) *self-care*. In modern Western societies, the notion of *care for Others* becomes part of a neoliberal legacy as it assumes shared responsibility for the *res publica*. This includes a certain degree of the redistribution of resources and rebalancing opportunities for creating chances of social action for everyone. At the discourse level, *care for Others* is realized in issues of *advocacy* (speaking/acting for or against, see Malkawi and Fareh 2023), and of fostering dispositions of empathy and solidarity for those who are recognized as weak, persecuted, or marginalized. The discursive transposition of these issues involves complex and in some cases ambiguity-laden mechanisms of positioning and self-positioning.

The notion of *self-care* is relatively new in discourse formations. It emerged recently as part of a vision of resilience against over-competitive logics of ableist (Western) societies. The concept of *self-care* expresses fundamental needs of self-protection. As a defense against overwhelming stressors, including high work demands (Squire and Nicolazzo 2019), it raises issues of work-life balance, the awareness of which has been heightened in the context of Covid-19. As resistance against social and psychological pressure (Willenberg 2023), it encourages attitudes of positivity toward one’s body, weaknesses, or limitations. However, by referring to physical and mental health and supporting new quality standards of optimization, *self-care* implicitly assumes self-centeredness and even egoism, in opposition to the

implicit altruism in attitudes of *care for Others*. This “healthy egocentrism” addresses real or staged self-sacrificial attitudes of the boomer years and of neoliberal heritage. New care attitudes are not only observed in younger generations, but also generally as societal change, e.g. when universities are being expected to provide students support and a type of protection (Squire and Nicolazzo 2019), or when private companies are expected to take care of their employees. The attention for care and selfcare is, interestingly, politically transversal and characteristic of heterogenous positions, for example, of political orientations inspired by religious principles, populist parties, as well as left-wing and ecological movements.

Having solidarity, responsibility, and commitment on one end, and a healthy effort of *self-caring* on the other, dimensions of care feed a whole spectrum of microsocial and macrosocial discourses, discussing overtly or implying the following questions:

- 1) With regard to *actors* and *agencies*, who has a duty to *care* for Others and who claims the right to be cared for? With regard to *arenas*, in which forums and through which media do individuals and groups negotiate their and others’ being care-beneficiaries and care-givers?
- 2) Which particular *aspects* of care systems are discursively highlighted (institutionalisation, professionalisation, privatisation)?
- 3) In which frames are *care attitudes* discursively figured as threatening one’s existence, security, and well-being, initiating practices of inclusion and exclusion, as well as (self)positioning and othering, founding identity and alterity discourses? Which narratives are activated?

For the purpose of exemplification, possible fields of analysis include:

- 1) *Self-care* – e.g. discourse on work-life balance, body positivity, health care;
- 2) Discursive argumentations in *care* discourses, for example
 - a) justification of values and ethical issues;
 - b) deontic perspectives (must – shall/will – want);
 - c) epistemic perspectives, e.g. construction of the weak (care-beneficiaries) and the strong (care-givers) in discursive negotiations;
 - d) emotions-based arguments for the advocacy of care;
 - e) metadiscursive and metapragmatic strategies (e.g. self-positioning and other-positioning strategies);
- 3) Manipulation of caring attitudes (unstable boundary between *care* and violence, *care* as mask for psychological aggression): stalking, patronizing, and matronizing speech;
- 4) Ritual dimensions (e.g. of apology).

The organisers approach these topics from an interdisciplinary linguistic perspective, and wish to invite researchers from all disciplines to contribute to disciplinary and interdisciplinary discussions. We particularly invite young scientists to discuss their projects. The formats are: single papers, posters, multimedia formats – for example videos or dialogues. The conference languages will be **English** and **German**.

Please send your submission (abstract, max. 500 words, not counting references) to: s.bonacchi@uw.edu.pl and waldemar.czachur@uw.edu.pl no later than 30th April 2024. Information about the acceptance will be sent to you no later than 30th June 2024.

Selected contributions will be published Open Access (CC BY-SA 3.0) in the form of Short Papers as part of the series *Diskurs – interdyscyplinär* at IDSopen (idsopen.de).

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