International and interdisciplinary workshop, Bayreuth, 10 - 12 October 2022

Doing ethics: Interdisciplinary perspectives on communicative practices and verbal devices

This workshop brings together linguists from different theoretical backgrounds and researchers from social sciences with an interest in moral discourse and everyday moralities. It aims first, to get a better understanding of the nexus between moralities and language – a topic that has so far been largely neglected by linguists –, and second, to gain deeper insights into the communicative functions of interjections in a broad sense, i.e. including 'response cries' (Goffman 1978), modal particles, etc. Interjections are regarded here as a prominent case of 'ethical affordances' (Keane 2017), and the focus is on their relation with moral norms and judgments. Given our own research foci, we put a spotlight on African varieties of French and their contact languages, but include also other speech communities. Besides data-based work on different interjections in relation with moralizing speech acts and activities, theoretical and methodological issues which contribute to a linguistic conceptualization of 'everyday moralities' (Bergmann & Luckmann 1999) or 'ordinary ethics' (Lambek 2015) take center-stage.

The study of moral discourse represents a challenge both for linguists and social scientists. While there is a growing interest in the social sciences, especially in sociology and anthropology, linguists have so far neglected the domain of moral communication. Some even doubt that linguistic, in particular discourse analytical, approaches can contribute to its elucidation arguing that there are no formal markers for moral evaluations, so that "we can only 'recognize' them on the basis of our commonsense cultural knowledge" (van Leeuwen 2008, 110). Others, in contrast, point to the difficulty of identifying distinct formal or structural features since a multitude of concomitant linguistic means converge in keying moral discourse (Spencer-Bennett 2018). Moral meanings are rather holistic, implicit, and context-sensitive and above all there is no unequivocal relation between form and function. Obviously, the verbal devices used for moral communication are language specific. The workshop aims to chart this interdisciplinary territory by putting a spotlight on everyday morality in its relation with language. Therefore, we are especially interested in the verbal means and communicative practices used for 'doing ethics' (Drescher/Rothfuß/Spies 2022). Among these ethical affordances, our focus will be on interjections and related phenomena.

While philosophers generally conceive of morality or ethics – two concepts we use interchangeably – as a complex of inner attitudes or as a system of values and norms, we understand it first and foremost as an activity that is deeply rooted in interaction (Luhmann 2008). Thus, moral discourse is conceived as the outcome of communicative practices. According to such a descriptive, constructivist and phenomenological conceptualization, there exist no moral phenomena as such, but only moral communication about phenomena (Bergmann & Luckmann 1999; Bergmann 1998). Rather the conversationalists constantly and co-constructively bring about the moral meaning of a state of affair or an event. Hence, 'doing ethics' is closely interwoven with language: "language is central to the ethical and the ethical to language" (Lambek 2015, 252).

Researchers in the social sciences also emphasize the ubiquitousness of ethics in everyday life. The "truly lived, trivial, omnipresent morality of everyday life" (Bergmann & Luckmann 1999, 17) emerges first in everyday conversation which is a privileged space for the analysis of ordinary ethics: "For social interactions are the natural home of justifications, excuses, accusations, reasons, praise, blame, and all the other ways in which ethics comes to be made explicit" (Keane 2017, 26). Yet, in order to become intelligible and socially relevant for others, there must be conventionalized signs and practices for the accomplishment of moral activities: "for the psychology of ethics to have a full social existence, it must be manifest in ways that are *taken to be* ethical by someone. Ethics must be embodied in certain palpable media such as words or deeds or bodily habits. The ethical implications must be at least potentially recognizable to other people" (Keane 2017, 35, emphasis in the original). It is against this background that the workshop addresses the issue of linguistic devices, communicative formats and practices that people typically use as resources to indicate moral concerns and to display moral stance.

Interjections and related phenomena seem very well suited for a closer investigation of the relation between language and doing ethics. These entities and their concomitant communicative practices provide a particularly useful lens for the analysis of moral discourse, since interjections count for many speech communities among the prominent means for indicating moral meanings. Thus, their study may offer valuable insights into the properties of moral discourse at large, in particular its communicative fabric, and therefore pave the way for further research in the realm of language. This endeavor can, of course, not be achieved without an ample and sufficiently diverse database.

Seen from a grammatical perspective, interjections form a heterogeneous and highly problematic category of speech which is often differentiated into primary and secondary interjections (Ameka 1992). Considered as speaker-centered, subjective forms, as pure 'emotive discharges' without any communicative meaning (Benveniste 1974), interjections were often reduced to their sole emotive function and seen as emotive words par excellence (Jakobson 1963). From a pragmatic perspective however, interjections translate the speaker's communicative attitudes and intentions in relation to a given situation. Hence, their meaning is highly context-dependent and they are generally part of more global communicative activities. In contrast to the narrow grammatical definition, we use 'interjection' rather as a proxy term for verbal devices that indicate interpersonal relations, convey evaluative meanings or express emotive and moral stances. Hence, we deliberately include modal expressions (Haßler 2022) and other phenomena which all share highly context-dependent meanings. Interjections have been studied quite extensively across different languages. But so far, relatively little attention has been paid to their relation with 'doing ethics' although they frequently appear in morally loaded contexts. Their ethical potential seems related to their emotive meaning. However, the entanglements between emotive and moral meanings are manifold. Moral meanings may have indeed emotive components because they refer directly or indirectly to human characters and deal with people's actions: "Moral language is frequently emotive, simply because the situations in which it is typically used are situations about which we often feel deeply" (Hare 1952, 144).

The workshop provides a platform to discuss these various issues at the interface of language and everyday ethics while at the same time promoting interdisciplinary research between linguists and social scientists. We invite contributions that reflect, from a more theoretical perspective, on conceptualizations of doing ethics as a communicative achievement and its role in everyday life as well as on the contribution of interjections to the emergence of particular moral meanings (blame, praise, indignation, excuse, advice, etc.) or on the entanglements between moral, emotive and modal meanings. Furthermore, we are looking for data-based studies on specific interjections and their formal and functional properties (also in language contact situations), on interjections as markers of moral stance or as part of particular moral practices, speech acts or more complex patterns such as genres. Research on morally loaded interjections as part of positioning practices, of the sequential organization of communication, or of specific institutional settings, is also welcome.

Literature (selective)

Ameka, Felix (1992): Interjection: The universal yet neglected part of speech. Journal of Pragmatics 15, 492-498.

Benveniste, Emile (1974): Problèmes de linguistique générale 2. Paris: Gallimard,

Bergmann, Jörg (1998): Introduction: Morality in discourse. Research on language and social interaction 31/3-4, 279-294.

Bergmann, Jörg & Luckmann, Thomas (1999): Moral und Kommunikation, in Bergmann, Jörg & Luckmann, Thomas (eds) Kommunikative Konstruktion von Moral. Vol. 1: Struktur und Dynamik der Formen moralischer Kommunikation. Opladen & Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 13-36.

Drescher, Martina, Rothfuß, Eberhard & Spies, Eva (2022): *Doing ethics*: Studying the emergence of moralities/ethics in everyday interaction. University of Bayreuth: unpublished manuscript, 14 p.

Goffman, Erving (1978): Response cries. Language 54/4, 787-815.

Hare, R. M. (1952): The language of morals. London: Oxford University Press.

Haßler, Gerda (ed.) (2022): Manuel des modes et modalites. Berlin & Boston: de Gruyter.

Jakobson, Roman (1963): Essais de linguistique générale. Paris: Minuit.

Keane, Webb (2017): Ethical life. Its natural and social histories. Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Lambek, Michael (2015): The ethical condition. Essays on action, person & value. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press.

Leeuwen van, Theo (2008): Discourse and Practice. New Tools for Critical Discourse Analysis. New York: Oxford University Press.

Luhmann, Niklas (2008): Soziologie der Moral, in Luhmann, Niklas, Die Moral der Gesellschaft. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 56-162.

Spencer-Bennett, Joe (2018): Moral Talk. Stance and Evaluation in Political Discourse. London & New York: Routledge.

Oumarou Boukari & Martina Drescher, University of Bayreuth (Germany), 5 April 2022