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# Giving Voice, Gaining Voice, *Seeing Voices*

*Insights from Linguistics, Literature, Education and Translation Studies*

**Ca' Foscari University of Venice, November 13-14, 2025**

The conference title, lending itself to different interpretations, encourages a broad reflection to which both the linguistic and literary disciplines can fruitfully contribute. Here, in fact, voice is not only intended as a linguistic tool but, it is also investigated in its expressive, ideological and identity-bound dimensions. The aim of this event, organized by the students enrolled in the 40th cycle of the PhD program in Modern Languages, Cultures and Societies and Language Sciences at Ca' Foscari University of Venice, is to encourage such reflection, addressing it through the following perspectives.

## **1) Rhetorical and Narratological Perspectives**

Voice, as a metaphor, is one of the most frequently employed concepts in rhetoric and literature. It encompasses both the act of writing and the resulting texts, as well as the writer, the readers, and the relationships that bind them. With its adaptability to different interpretations, depending on the chosen approach and the desired outcome, it is a valuable tool for text analysis.

Reflecting on voice in relation to the figure of the narrator is particularly productive: Genette (1972/1980), indeed, reduces voice to the communicative function of that figure, an interpretation problematized by phenomena such as free indirect speech and internally focused language. The study of the voice also cannot be separated from the investigation of the characters, to be understood according to Bakhtin's rhetorical approach: this includes the concept of 'polyphony,' which theorizes a plurality of autonomous voices, to be regarded as independent and equivalent consciousnesses. In this perspective, literary characters become “not only objects of authorial discourse but also subjects of their own directly signifying discourse” (Bakhtin, 1929/1984).

We welcome contributions addressing, but not limited to, the following topic:

- Narratological perspectives on the concept of voice, from classical narratology to its more recent derivations (first-, second-, or third-person narration; unique or multiple

perspectives; choral novels; unreliable narrator; focalization and the representation of other minds).

## **2) Literature, Post-Colonial and Socio-Cultural Studies**

In literature, the concept of voice can take on different nuances and connotations depending on the privileged perspective of analysis: for example, it can be linked to the messages that authors intend to convey—in the first person or through their characters—emphasizing, in some cases, less standard or alternative points of view. Employing this metaphor allows the investigation of the processes of authorial identity formation while taking into account the dynamics of the publishing market and audiences' tastes, and, thus, confronting it with the existing literary canon by taking into account all affinities with and divergences from it. At times, there could be an absence of voices, thus finding (lack of) expression through eloquent silences imbued with a strong communicative charge.

Finally, it can become a political act, bringing oppressed or marginalized figures to the fore. This latter aspect becomes relevant when discussing the so-called subaltern people, or, as described by Gramsci, the social groups subject to the hegemony of the ruling classes (Ashcroft et al., 2007). This thought acquires significance in the controversial question posed by Spivak (1988) in the celebrated essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, which critically examines the possibility of affirming, representing and listening to the voices of marginalized groups. Sometimes, the concept of subalternity can be conceived beyond an anthropocentric paradigm. In some narratives, non-human animals are made (co-)protagonists of events as sentient beings endowed with cognitive-emotional capacities, thus conveying a voice that we perhaps too often place, using the words by Menino (2012), “beyond our Hearing.”

We welcome contributions addressing, but not limited to, the following topics:

- Subaltern and/or repressed voices of authors and characters, with a focus on women's, ethnic or queer fiction, immigration or exile literature;
- Imposition of a dominant voice and investigation of authorial intentions (the influence of prevailing aesthetic canons, presence of voice, absence of voice: stories where even silence can speak);
- Editorial histories (censorship, works with multiple editions presenting relevant changes, authors' relationship with editors, mentors and audiences);
- Narrative strategies through which non-human animal points of view emerge and human-animal communication can be conveyed; the presence of the animal voice in literary texts.

## **3) Translation Studies: specialized languages**

The (un)intentional use of specific discursive resources, especially lexical choices, as well as a specific way of structuring texts and information, together with interpersonal relations, plays

a crucial role in shaping the style of an enunciative act (Castelló et al., 2011). This is particularly dominant in specialized languages, whose rhetorical and discursive strategies often align with domain-specific conventions (Castelló et al., 2011). In the evolving landscape of augmented translation (Kornacki et al., 2024), translators are required to deeply understand the dimensions of specialized languages (Calvi et al., 2011) and the strategies needed to enunciate *almost the same thing* (Eco, 2013) across linguistic and cultural contexts. Gender-inclusive language from the twenty-first century (Pfalzgraf, 2024) poses an additional translation challenge.

We welcome contributions addressing, but not limited to, the following topics:

- Translation and translation technologies: the role of machine translation systems in rendering specialized *voice* and discourse while maintaining communicative accuracy;
- Gender-Inclusive language as a *voice* of existence and resistance: translation challenges.

#### **4) General and Theoretical Linguistics: Voice and Diathesis**

The concept of voice in Linguistics has been articulated in various ways, in relation to the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic prominence given to different arguments.

From a formal point of view, the syntactic peculiarities of the agent have led to postulate its status as an external argument, introduced by a functional head *VOICE* (Marantz, 1984; Kratzer, 1996). The generalisability of this proposal is challenged by verbs that require a representation of the agent within the lexical semantics of the root (Ausensi et al. 2020).

From a functional perspective, one and the same event can be conceptualized from different viewpoints according to the visibility given to certain participants over others. This can be achieved by means of different strategies among which is *voice* (see Fox and Hopper 1994 for an overview). Depending on cross-linguistic syntactic variation as well as on different communication needs, different Voice values, marked on the predicate and corresponding to particular diathesis (hereby intended as the mapping of semantic roles onto grammatical roles, Zúñiga and Kittilä, 2019: 4), can be employed to modulate actant prominence.

We welcome contributions exploring, but not limited to, the following domains:

- Linguistic effects of the *VOICE* functional head and representations of the agent in the syntax and in the lexicon (Ausensi, 2023 and references above);
- Voice phenomena: semantic properties and discourse phenomena associated with it (Chafe, 1987; Givon, 1993);

- The interaction of the aforementioned elements in contemporary news report discourse, showing how different linguistic frames (Fillmore, 2006) trigger different perceptions concerning, e.g., responsibility attribution.

## **5) Applied Linguistics and Language Education: acquisitional and educational perspectives**

In the recommendations of the Council of Europe (2022) *The Importance of Plurilingual and Intercultural Education for Democratic Culture* is delineated the valuable role of Language Education in fostering democratic culture. “Giving voice” as teachers and educators means developing and enhancing the languages and cultures that each student brings to school from a *plurilingual* and holistic perspective (Candelier et al., 2012; Council of Europe, 2001, 2020). These integrated linguistic repertoires consist of mother language, heritage, L $\neq$ 1 and minor languages, as well as Sign languages and the culture of deaf communities (Council of Europe, 2022: 13). As described in the celebrated *Seeing Voices* (Sacks, 1990: 131): “ [...] signing is not just the manipulation of symbols according to grammatical rules, but, irreducibly, the voice of the signer - a voice given a special force, because it utters itself, so immediately, with the body”.

Promoting democratic culture in the language classroom also means adopting methodologies which foster learner autonomy (Little, 2007) and communication in various languages, considering the specific linguistic needs of all students in order to make learning accessible. From this perspective Sign languages can give voice, serving as a bridge not only in deafness conditions but also for students affected by language disorders.

We welcome contributions addressing, but not limited to, the following topics:

- Language learner autonomy;
- Development of plurilingual and intercultural competence in different languages, including sign languages;
- Acquisition, assessment and linguistic analysis of the use of sign and spoken languages in language and/or cognitive impairments for the communicative autonomy;
- Inclusive teaching methodologies and strategies for linguistic accessibility.

### Submission guidelines

The abstract, of a maximum of 350 words and 5 bibliographical references (excluded from word count), must be sent to the scientific-organizing committee by May 1, 2025 by filling out the form available on the conference [website](#). Abstracts in LIS can be submitted in video format, with a maximum duration of 2 minutes (max 100MB).

Contributions are to be delivered as an oral presentation up to a maximum of 20 minutes (+ 5 minutes of questions). The abstract must be uploaded in pdf or mp4 format and renamed Surname\_DC\_Unive25.

The conference languages will be English, Italian, and LIS. Depending on the contributions we will receive, a session with Italian⇌LIS interpretation service will be scheduled.

For further information, feel free to contact us at [convegnophd.lcsmsl@unive.it](mailto:convegnophd.lcsmsl@unive.it).

The event will be held in-person at Ca' Bernardo Room B (Sala B) and registration will be free of charge. Travel costs are covered by attendees.

### Deadline recap

- Submission: March 15 - May 1, 2025
- Notification of selection: July 31, 2025
- Registration: September 1-15, 2025

### Scientific-organizing committee

Antonella Bove, Maria Andrea Carboni, Eleonora Digiorgio, Giorgia Fattori, Felicita Gelmini, Federica Marengi, Emma Quiriconi, Francesca Zanotti.

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