

## **Report on the international conference**

### **“Arguing Health Communication in the Digital Era”**

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of September, 2019 the first international conference “Arguing Health Communication in the Digital Era” took place in the Casa del Mercante in Brescia and was hosted by the Department of Economics and Management of University of Brescia in collaboration with BAAL, the Department of Medical and Surgical Specialties, Radiological Sciences, and Public Health of the University of Brescia, the Associazione Nazionale Assistenti Sanitari (AsNAS), the Accademia Lombarda della Sanità Pubblica and the School of Management and Advanced Education (SMAE). It was also the first time that an Italian university has had the pleasure of hosting a conference with a BAAL SIG in Italy. The conference approached the field of linguistics (and more specifically Conversation and Discourse Analysis, Interactional Sociolinguistics, and Narrative Analysis) and health communication by starting from the challenges involved in communicating about health in different settings and the necessity for discourse analysts and healthcare professionals to join forces and expand their perspective beyond traditional doctor–patient communication and “beyond the clinic” by integrating multiple semiotic modes and media. This was accomplished by focusing on new tools, tests and apps as well as the way in which digital communication conveys knowledge and changes the public’s perspective on healthcare communication and practices.

Along with many institutions, the conference was greatly enriched with key speakers hailing from different countries and having different professional backgrounds whose contributions brought new methodologies and practical case studies, as well as emerging new questions and issues that digital technologies bring to healthcare communication. The introductory comments to the conference were delivered by Prof. Grazia Speranza, Deputy Vice Chancellor of the University of Brescia, Prof. Roberto Maroldi, Director of the Department of Medical and Surgical Specialties, Radiological Sciences, and Public Health, University of Brescia, Prof. Annalisa Zanola, Full Professor of English Language and Deputy of Foreign Languages, University of Brescia, and Dr. Nelya Koteyko, Convenor of Health&Science Communication SIG, British Association for Applied Linguistics before introducing the plenary speakers.

The first keynote speaker was Prof. Srikant Sarangi, Professor in Humanities and Medicine and Director of the Danish Institute of Humanities and Medicine/Health (DIHM), Aalborg University on “Communicative modes and modalities underpinning expertise and trust in technology-mediated healthcare delivery” which addressed the conceptual and communicative themes of dispersion of expertise and dissolution of trust by drawing on an ongoing emergency medical services (EMS) project where the traditional telephone and digital mediation are both employed. This was followed by Prof. Sara Rubinelli, President of the European Association for Communication in Healthcare (EACH), University of Lucerne, whose talk on “Knowledge co-creation in online communities towards a better health services delivery and medical care” had the threefold aim of providing a historical and sociological analysis of the shift of the patient’s role from ‘user’ to ‘provider’ of health information, identifying the value of working together with active patients to get unique insight into the lived

experience of health and highlighting some starting points for health institutions to co-design health information and health communication in partnership with patients. The presentation by Prof. Pier Luigi Lopalco, MD, Professor of Hygiene and Preventive Medicine, University of Pisa “Effective public health communication in the era of social media” completes such observations by pointing out that effective communication determines the success of public health intervention and that its access is a fundamental right of the citizen while advocating public health to be present and proactive and the use of champions, alliance with civil society, and partnerships with institutional communication agencies like broadcast and newspaper companies. The final presentation by Dr. Eugenio Santoro, Head of the Laboratory of Medical Informatics, Department of Public Health, IRCCS – Mario Negri Institute, Milan and titled “Social media and health communication: the role of health institutions” presented some of the results of the "Communication, social media and health: a research focus" survey.

The keynote presentations were followed by the BAA AGM of the Health and Science Communication SIG conducted by Dr. Nelya Koteyko and Dr. Daniel Hunt and then by panel presentations of scholars from many different countries (Italy, the United Kingdom, Hungary, Sweden, Spain, Poland and Chile) many of which were BAAL members. The panel presentations continued the debates that had been previously raised during the keynote presentations and maintained the focus on the intersection between healthcare communication, linguistics and digital technology. This was done by starting from topics such as women’s health, digital health technology projects, doctor and patient healthcare communication, verbal and visual healthcare representations, truthfulness in online healthcare, and weight issues in social media. The conclusion of the panel presentations led to that of the conference with concluding remarks and considerations by Prof. Srikant Sarangi and Prof. Sara Rubinelli, as well as the main organisers of the conference, Prof. Annalisa Zanola (Full Professor of English Language, University of Brescia) and Prof. Umberto Gelatti (Full Professor of Medical Sciences, University of Brescia) and a final discussion with the audience that led to reflections on matters that had been touched during the conference, as well as personal comments and experiences.