

## The language of/for gender variant people

Panel Proposal to be presented at the CADAAD 2016, University of Catania, 5-7 September 2016

Conveners: **Giuseppe Balirano** (University of Naples L'Orientale), **Tommaso Milani** (University of the Witwatersrand), **Francesca Vigo** (University of Catania)

Gender variant people have recently acquired an unprecedented visibility, which may seem to lead to a growing acceptance.

We all know how powerful language is and what an extraordinary tool it is, when it comes to societies' positioning and representation, let it alone its strength as it concerns societies' value building.

Language can bring to light, can give life but it can also hinder people's comprehension or lead to marginalize minority groups. Diversity is always a challenge, and a social challenge especially. Diversity scares, worries, embarrasses and it is often dealt with by means of language, or to say it better, it is often sorted out through silence, or confusion, through the improper use of linguistic items which prevent from understanding the situations fully. Gender variant people are perceived as diverse and it seems that no linguistic tools are available to uproot this belief. When diversity is related to gender, the images conveyed through language are not only biased but also exclusively negative, usually related to monstrosity, danger and illness

Ad-hoc biased images construed through linguistic exercises of power tend to depict transgender, gender variant, and gender non-conforming people within negative representations relating mainly to illness, monstrosity and death. Both power and gender are linguistically embedded in social practice since they derive their meanings from the human activities they refer to. The non-binary categorisation of gender practices, and the new possibilities opened by scientific advances and changing attitudes throughout the twentieth century, have proven a significant challenge to languages, which had not previously been seriously demanded to accommodate areas between the two established genders. A new interest in the use of inclusive language, which means not misgendering people, is a novel linguistic practice which forces languages to amplify their binary gender lenses in order to encompass non binary gendered people. It is necessary to work on categorization and how this influences the social perception of the context. The gender variant world is internally highly varied and this is hardly perceived, let alone known. We think that a real revolution in the way societies perceive and name gender variant people cannot avoid looking at the theories that have been generated within the gender variant world, looking at how the gender variant world talks of itself, etc.

Up to now, research and scholars have focused on the description on gender variant people, looking at them from an external position, language studies have analysed large numbers of examples and this has raised people's awareness enormously, but it is not enough. It is time to put the two points of view together: the external and the gender variant internal one.

Together with this, working on the lexical level seems a priority. The gender variant world is characterized by a rich vocabulary, which widens up constantly and this does not seem to influence any use of language, which flows smoothly as it has always been doing.

We feel that trying to bring to light all those who are gender variant is not enough. We, as linguists, are now in a privileged position which allows us to start a new course of inclusive critical studies.

We invite original contributions on theoretical reflections from critical discourse analysts with an interest in the language of gender variant people connected with the themes identified and produced in English speaking countries. Intercultural and interdisciplinary approaches are most welcome.

All papers will be allocated 20 minutes plus 10 minutes for questions. The language of the conference is English.

Abstracts of 250-350 words excluding references should be sent as MS Word attachment to [gbalirano@unior.it](mailto:gbalirano@unior.it), [tommaso.milani@wits.ac.za](mailto:tommaso.milani@wits.ac.za), [vigof@unict.it](mailto:vigof@unict.it), before 10 January 2016. Please include in the body of the email but not in the abstract itself (1) your name, (2) affiliation and (3) email address. Notifications of acceptance will be communicated by 1 March 2016.