School of Applied Linguistics

Università
della
Svizzera
italiana

PhD Program in Applied Linguistics: Final Event

	Thursday, 22 May
10.00	Welcome Villa Sträuli Museumstrasse 60 8400 Winterthur
10.15–11.15	Keynote: **Prof. Dr. Daniel Perrin** On, for, and with practitioners – Fostering transdisciplinary PhD programs in times of science criticism
11.15–11.30	Break
11.30–12.00	**Nataly Pineda-Castañeda** Mapping causal language, disagreement, and factual belief polarization in climate change discussion
12.00–14.00	Lunch Break (Villa Sträuli)
14.00–15.00	Keynote: **Prof. Dr. Marlies Whitehouse** Transdisciplinarity in financial communication. Writing for target readers
15.00–15.30	**Giulia D'Agostino** You better answer the question better. How questions shape the conversation – and potentially, the future of a company too
15.30–16.00	Coffee Break
16.00–17.00	Keynote **Dr. Carlo Torniai** A conversation on the need of "argumentation spaces" for sustainable data and AI-centric organizations
18.30	Conference dinner Restaurant Bloom, Stadthausstrasse 4, 8400 Winterthur

	Friday, 23 May
09.00–10.00	Poster Session: **Isabelle Suremann, Chiara Mercuri, Lorenzo Cosci,** **Marta Trutalli, Lenny Kaye Bugayong**
10.00–10.30	Coffee Break
10.30–11.30	Keynote: **Dr. Marius Born** Building trust in startup communication: Connecting heart and mind through arguments and stories
11.30–12.00	**Narjes Sheikh Asadi** Revealing argumentative patterns: Underlying the genre-specific moves in research articles
12.00–13.30	Lunch Break (Villa Sträuli)
13.30–14.30	Keynote: **Prof. Dr. Andrea Rocci** Back to argumentation basics
14.30	Closing

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Book of abstracts | Keynotes

Building trust in startup communication:
Connecting heart and mind through arguments and stories
Dr. Marius Born (ZHAW Zurich University of Applied Sciences, Winterthur)

The formula of e → i, or "Emotion before Information," might seem simple, but it's transformative in mass communication. When we feel, we care—and only then does the mind truly open up to capturing new information. In a world overwhelmed with data, emotional connection is the key to capturing and holding attention. Yet, especially in business, we often rush to the facts, pushing information before connection, numbers before narrative. Imagine this: instead of diving straight into the data, what if we start with a story that resonates? What if we tap into curiosity, empathy, or excitement first? By leading with emotion, we create a space where information isn't just heard but felt and remembered. But the true art lies in crafting narratives that touch the heart without sacrificing the mind. How do we create stories that captivate emotionally while staying grounded in logic and reason?
This question was at the heart of my PhD project. It explored how stories and structured arguments can interweave, particularly in scenarios where tangible evidence is limited, and trust must be established through plausible, credible communication. This approach is crucial for startup founders, who are often tasked with persuading investors of their vision without an extensive track record. Here, strategic communicative trust-building is paramount, and the cost of losing that trust is high. In my keynote I will talk about the case of the Nikola Corporation, an Arizona-based startup that entered the field of next-generation propulsion technologies. Their rapid rise and subsequent challenges underscore both the power and potential perils of narrative-driven communication in tech startups. And I will talk about how my research project has enriched my consulting work and how theory and practice can be mutually enriching.

Born, Marius. (2024). Building trust in startup communication: Exploring the interplay of arguments and stories in the case of the Nikola corporation. Cham: Springer. https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-031-63284-6 (open access)

On, for, and with practitioners
Fostering transdisciplinary PhD programs in times of science criticism
Prof. Dr. Daniel Perrin (ZHAW Zurich University of Applied Sciences, Winterthur)

Fake news, conspiracy theories, and criticism toward science and academia challenge rational discourse and decision-making on societal levels. In academia, the humanities and social sciences tend to experience both harsh criticism and dwindling funding. Against this backdrop, systematically preparing next generations of scholars to mediate between the main discourses in sciences, professional fields outside academia, and society at large can both foster the scholars' individual success and bolster the standing of science in everyday life. This contribution explains how – and to what effect – cooperations between Swiss universities have woven this rationale into a series of PhD programs in Applied Linguistics.

Perrin, D.. (2025). On, for, and with practitioners. Fostering transdisciplinary dissertations in times of science criticism. Swiss Academies Communication, 20(3). https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15261812

Back to the argumentation basics
Prof. Dr. Andrea Rocci (Università della Svizzera Italiana, Lugano)

As several of the PhD students of the LAND program draw near to completing dissertations where they present theoretically and methodologically sophisticated explorations of argumentation in different contexts of interaction of our datafied society, it is perhaps worth going back to the fundamentals and to the beginnings of the broad interdisciplinary research program on "argumentation in context" many of these theses, more or less explicitly, refer to. What is argumentation, after all? What have we learned about it? What makes our knowledge of it valuable and distinct from what more mainstream philosophers, logicians, psychologists, communication scholars or even mainstream linguists might (incidentally) say about it? I will approach these questions by going back to a unique paper published by Eddo Rigotti and Sara Greco in 2009, halfway between a foundational manifesto and a pedagogical introduction to the field. I will revisit a few now half-forgotten parts of that paper, such as the oddly named "fishbone model", and I will reflect on the double valence of argumentation as "an object of interest" and as "a cultural resource", highlighted in the paper. The hope is to stimulate a productive discussion with the participants, where a retrospective consideration of their thesis work nourishes a broad scope vision on the value of their intellectual pursuit for themselves and for society.

Rigotti, E., & Greco Morasso, S. (2009). Argumentation as an Object of Interest and as a Social and Cultural Resource. In N. Muller Mirza & A.-N. Perret-Clermont (Eds.), *Argumentation and Education* (pp. 9–66). Springer US. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-387-98125-3_2

A conversation on the need of "argumentation spaces"
for sustainable data and AI-centric organizations
Dr. Carlo Torniai (Angelini Industries)

This session explores the fundamental yet often undervalued role of argumentation skills in data and AI-centric organizations. Argumentation has always been at the core of strategic decision-making and governance processes in organizations, whether formally recognized or not. As Generative AI technologies become increasingly embedded in strategic decision-making, the ability to critically identify issues, evaluate and articulate solutions, raise related questions and defend positions, emerges as an essential competency for organizational success. In this session, we will examine how different AI types (predictive vs. generative) impact decision-making processes that underpin organizational strategy, highlighting a paradox: increasingly sophisticated data processing capabilities might lead to the dismissal of human critical thinking and argumentative dialogue rather than demanding their advancement. We aim to foster collaboration between business practitioners and argumentation scholars to define, develop, and preserve vital "argumentative spaces" that might otherwise be considered obsolete due to technological advancement. The session will culminate in a facilitated brainstorming segment where participants, as argumentation experts, will contribute their knowledge on key theoretical and analytical concepts related to argumentation and on emerging research topics (such as computational argumentation and discussion in polylog). The hope is that together we can start identifying potential avenues for applied research and practical approaches to address this problem space with its vast societal and organizational implications.

Transdisciplinarity in financial communication. Writing for target readers
Prof. Dr. Marlies Whitehouse (ZHAW Zurich University of Applied Sciences, Winterthur)

"Buy", "hold", or "sell" – these three words summarize the most frequent financial analysts' recommendations to investors. And these three words are easy enough to understand: the investors are advised to buy, hold, or sell securities, i.e. stocks, bonds, or warrants. But do investors, and especially retail investors, understand the reasoning behind these recommendations?
This presentation identifies and analyses problems of text production in finance from three complementary perspectives and explains why solving these problems benefits theory, practice, and society at large. Thereby, it carries out a research project in transdisciplinary collaboration from the very first to the very last step and proposes evaluated and valid measures to improve writing in finance.

Whitehouse, Marlies. (2023). Transdisciplinarity in financial communication. Writing for target readers: Palgrave Macmillan. https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-031-29115-9 (open access)

Book of abstracts | Presentations

You better answer the question better.
How questions shape the conversation – and potentially, the future of a company too.
Giulia D'Agostino (Università della Svizzera Italiana, Lugano)

Interdisciplinary research in financial communication offers unique insights into extra-discursive correlations with linguistic phenomena – namely, how discourse is related (and potentially shapes) real-world events such as stock prices fluctuations. Our four-year project precisely did that: it investigated linguistic data of Q&A exchanges and annotated it thoroughly with a multitude of variables that – taken together in variable subsets – allows for a keen understanding of the interactional dynamics of the dialogue, and to verify how this is received by the interlocutor as well as the wider public. This presentation aims at giving a streamlined outlook of how such research may conducted – from theory building to predictive tool deployment – within a SNSF project and nurtured by a doctoral programme such as LAND.

Mapping causal language, disagreement, and factual belief polarization
in climate change discussion
Nataly Pineda-Castañeda (Università della Svizzera Italiana, Lugano)

This presentation will provide an overview of my research within the iTrust project. Broadly, the project aims to combine manual and automatic annotation of online discussions, and to use analytics to detect implicit patterns of polarization in discourse. In particular, my research focuses on disagreements over causal statements and factual belief polarization in the discussions around the issue of climate change. I'll share some of the findings from two working papers:
The first paper examines causal language in Reddit discussions. First, through a semi-supervised automatic annotation we detect causal expressions and then capture the patterns of causal expression or "causal profiles" that characterize climate science-oriented discussions and climate skeptical-oriented discussions. By contrasting the causal profiles, we highlight differences in causal expression between groups with opposing positions. Second, we analyze how these causal expressions function within the broader dialogue network, determining whether they contribute to arguments, conflicts, or counter-arguments. By combining these two layers of analysis, we gain understanding on how causal language contributes to factual belief polarization.
The second paper analyzes Twitter debates. We combine manual annotation and language models to annotate the corpus with causal frames and features related to ethos, sentiments, and emotions, and employed statistical analysis to test associations between the annotated features. We find that causality expressions intertwine with expressions of negative emotions and sentiments, and that there is a correlation between disagreement over actors and responsibilities and ethos-based attacks on entities. We observe that causal expressions, ethos constructions, and emotional expressions are aspects of meaning that correlate and form patterns in polarized discourse.

Revealing argumentative patterns: Underlying the genre-specific moves in research articles
Narjes Sheikh Asadi (Università della Svizzera Italiana, Lugano)

This study investigates the loci (argument schemes, cf. Frans van Eemeren) embedded within the rhetorical moves of academic research article (RA) introductions. Specifically, it explores how stereotypical loci surface in Swales' (1990) CaRS model moves. Swales' framework outlines rhetorical moves that serve distinct communicative purposes, which are not only functional (Biber, 2007) but also argumentatively relevant. Each move corresponds to a generic standpoint (Filimon, 2011; Pollaroli & Rocci, 2015) that authors must defend to persuade readers of their research's value, often by appealing to its importance and novelty.

The corpus comprises 80 RA introductions in the field of Language and Linguistics, annotated using Swales' model. A sub-corpus of 16 texts was then selected for detailed pragma-dialectical reconstruction (van Eemeren, 2018). Using OVA, the study visualizes the link between rhetorical moves, their standpoints, argumentation structures, and associated loci.

A three-tier analytical framework is applied: first, rhetorical moves are identified; second, their argumentation structures are reconstructed; third, stereotypical loci are identified. For example, in Move 1 (establishing a research territory), the locus from authority is frequently employed in Step 3 (reviewing previous research). Move 2, which introduces the niche, often features loci from alternatives, final cause, or even ignorance. Move 3, which occupies the niche, regularly invokes the locus from final cause.

These recurrent loci are both stereotypical and prototypical, offering a novel interpretation of Swales' model. This integrated approach redefines rhetorical moves in RA introductions through the lens of Pragma-Dialectics and the Argument Model of Topic.

Biber, D. (2007). *Discourse on the move: Using corpus analysis to describe discourse structure* (Vol. 28). John Benjamins Publishing.

Filimon, I. Agatha. 2011a. "Argumentative Valences of the Key-phrase Value Creation in Corporate Reporting". In *Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference of the International Society for the Study of Argumentation*, ed. by Frans H. van Eemeren, Bart Garssen, David Godden, and Gordon Mitchell, 461–479. Amsterdam: SicSat.

Filimon, I. Agatha. 2011b. "*The Persuasiveness of Two-sided Messages in Corporate Reporting Discourse*." Paper presented at the conference *Communication and Cognition* 2011: Manipulation, Persuasion and Deception in Language, Neuchâtel, January 26, 2011.

Pollaroli, C., & Rocci, A. (2015). The argumentative relevance of pictorial and multimodal metaphor in advertising. *Journal of argumentation in context*, *4*(2), 158-199.

Rigotti, E., & Greco, S. (2019). *Inference in Argumentation*. Argumentation Library, 34.

Swales, J. M. (1990). *Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings*. Cambridge University Press.

van Eemeren, F. H. (2018). *Argumentation Theory: A Pragma-dialectical Perspective*. Springer.

van Eemeren, F. H. (2016). Identifying argumentative patterns: A vital step in the development of pragma-dialectics. *Argumentation*, *30*(1), 1-23.

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"Stick to being a speech canal": How a cognitive-inferential model of human communication like Relevance Theory can improve the screening process for interpreters in the Swiss asylum context
Lenny Kaye Bugayong (University of Fribourg, ZHAW)

Interpreting services are increasingly gaining in importance in post-migrant societies. In the Swiss Asylum Procedure, where the need for interpreting for certain languages at times arises very suddenly, the Swiss State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) must at times resort to interpreters without formal training. Nonetheless, these aspiring SEM interpreters must first undergo an assessment, which is carried out by evaluators who themselves are not formally trained interpreters either. Based on ideas from Relevance Theory (RT, Sperber & Wilson 1986/1995) and exploring the notion of *interpretive resemblance* (Gutt, 2000), my thesis offers a qualitative analysis of the interpretations by aspiring SEM interpreters and of the evaluation reports. The data not only offers a rare glimpse into the interpreting output of interpreters who may or may not have undergone formal training, it also reveals those parts of human communication that appear especially vulnerable when transferring information from one language to another. Furthermore, the analysis aims to juxtapose cognitive-inferential approaches to interpreting quality with the SEM's institutional ideals and idealizations ("stick to being a speech canal"). The analysis reveals both the pitfalls as well as the potentials of the current screening process and explores some of the analytical tools offered by RT that may prove useful for developing a more valid test.

RGUTT, E.-A. 2000. Translation and Relevance, Manchester & Boston, St. Jerome Publishing.
SPERBER, D. & WILSON, D. 1986, 1995. Relevance, Oxford, Blackwell.

Pragma-dialectics as a theoretical approach to argumentation in mathematics education
Lorenzo Cosci (Università della Svizzera Italiana)

In mathematics education, argumentation is recognised as an extremely relevant competence by the national guidelines and school plans, as well as by the various frameworks of international surveys. These frameworks identify the importance of argumentation in the education of each student throughout their school career, recognising the centrality of argumentative practice in the life of the citizen in contemporary society. Often in mathematics lessons, students are asked to explicate their reasoning when solving a problem. A pragma-dialectics definition of argumentation makes it possible to compare the concepts of argumentation and reasoning, highlighting their differences and enabling teachers to be more aware of their teaching practice.
In the near future, the perspective that the Argumentum Model of Topics (AMT), developed on the basis of pragma-dialectics, can provide in analysing mathematical discussions will be investigated. This will allow comparisons with Toulmin's model, which is widely used in mathematics education.
Finally, it will also be appropriate to investigate mathematics teachers' beliefs about argumentation, concerning how it is defined, developed with students, and evaluated.

**Conflicting frames as argumentative misalignments
in the public controversy surrounding sustainable fashion**
Chiara Mercuri (Università della Svizzera Italiana)

This research aims to determine the relationship between conflicting frames and argumentative premises in the public controversy surrounding sustainable fashion. In a controversy, the parties involved tend to hold conflicting frames about reality, which lead their positions to become polarized and in turn exacerbate the conflict. According to conflict resolution studies (e.g. Shmueli, 2008), frame analysis is crucial to understand the interests at issue within conflicts and controversies. Building on these studies, which remain at the level of identifying frames depending on what is explicitly said in discourse, the present research claims that an argumentation-based approach (van Eemeren, 2018; Rigotti & Greco, 2019) can help to make a step forward, that is, to reconstruct the partially implicit arguments laying behind conflicting frames.In order to investigate how conflicting frames are related to argumentation, this research analyses a multi-genre corpus composed of texts issued by different players involved in the controversy. After identifying the conflicting frames present in the corpus, the different argumentative premises associated to them are reconstructed. The findings suggest that conflicting frames constitute an instance of argumentative misalignments, that is, they represent discrepancies in the opening stage of the parties. At the theoretical level, this contribution brings forward the reflection on the relationship between the discursive interpretation of frames, their connection to implicit premises in argumentation and their potential to analyse public controversies.

Rigotti, E., & Greco, S. (2019). *Inference in argumentation: A topics-based approach to argument schemes.* Springer.
Shmueli, D. (2008). Framing in geographical analysis of environmental conflicts: Theory, methodology and three case studies. *Geoforum, 39*(6), 2048-2061. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2008.08.006
Van Eemeren, F. H. (2018). *Argumentation theory: A pragma-dialectical perspective.* Springer.

A typology of meta-discursive statements within the vaccination discourse in Switzerland
Isabelle Suremann (ZHAW Zurich University of Applied Sciences, Winterthur)

"You cannot say anything anymore!" or "Why does no one talk about this?" – such statements illustrate that not only discourse analysts observe and reflect on public discourse and the knowledge orders it constructs, but also non-academic members of the discourse community. According to Schröter (2021), meta-discursive statements are defined as statements on public discourse and discourse phenomena, including claims of absences or silencing, reflections on access to discourse, and the problematisation of key terms. Analysing meta-discursive statements provides valuable insights into how individuals respond to public discourse and can help explain shifts in public opinions on vaccination. Therefore, an analysis of meta-discursive statements holds potential for enhancing public health communication. To broadly and deeply engage with this relatively novel research topic, I employ both quantitative and qualitative methods. I also draw on different corpora and thus include texts from a wide range of sources, including government and non-government organisations, online forums, and media.

First, a logistic regression analysis identifies typical linguistic features of meta-discursive statements and enables the compilation of two separate corpora: one with, and one without meta-discursive statements. These corpora and especially their differences are then examined using various methods like keyword and collocation analysis. A close reading of selected texts helps to contextualise meta-discursive statements. Finally, by triangulating these methods, this thesis develops a typology of meta-discursive statements within the vaccination discourse in the German-speaking region of Switzerland between 2000 and 2025.

Schröter, M. (2021). Diskurs als begrenzter Raum. Metadiskurs über den öffentlichen Diskurs in den neurechten Periodika Junge Freiheit und Sezession. In S. Pappert, C. Schlicht, M. Schröter, S. Hermes, C. Riniker, & C. Spieß (Hrsg.), *Skandalisieren, stereotypisieren, normalisieren* (Bd. 27). Helmut Buske Verlag.

Emotive argumentation in digital activists' discourse concerning sustainable fashion
Marta Trutalli (Università della Svizzera Italiana)

This study takes part in the ongoing debate on social media about the public controversy surrounding fashion sustainability. Its main goal is to explore the connection between emotion and argumentation in digital activists' discourse, providing an understanding of emotions from an inferential perspective, which have not been addressed by the linguistic approach to argumentation.
Recent argumentative studies (e.g. Greco, Mercuri and De Cock 2021) have shown digital activists' communicative aim of raising awareness on new discussion issues and advocating for more sustainability of the fashion system. An exemplary case is given by Fashion Revolution (FR) campaigns. Especially when related to emotionally charged events, such as the tragic accident of Rana Plaza in April 2013 in Bangladesh, activists' argumentation is arguably related to the *locus from termination and setting up*. As noted in previous studies related to dispute mediation, this locus leverages the possibility to modify the current situation evoking a hope-oriented emotional dynamic.
This contribution draws on a corpus of 100 Instagram posts of activists' messages posted during the Fashion Revolution weeks 2023 and 2024, which contain the words "Rana Plaza" in text or hashtags, and intends to combine the analysis of loci, as based on the Argumentum Model of Topics (Rigotti and Greco 2019) with the linguistic analysis of emotions, as based on Micheli's model (2010; 2014) to see how emotions are linguistically expressed in activists' discourse and how they interact with argumentative inference.

Greco, S., Mercuri, C., & De Cock, B. (2021). Victims or agents of change? The representation and self-representation of women in the social media debate surrounding sustainable fashion. *Babylonia, 2021*(3), 90–94.
Micheli, R. (2010). Emotions as objects of argumentative constructions. *Argumentation*, *24*(1), 1-17.
Micheli, R. (2014). *Les émotions dans les discours: modèle d'analyse, perspectives empiriques*. De Boeck Supérieur.
Rigotti, E., Greco, S. (2019). *Inference in argumentation: A topics-based approach to argument-schemes.* Cham: Springer.