3. PROJECT/PUBLICATIONS

The overall project

Some key figures about our project:

- Project sum: CHF 1'597'904 (SNSF, Sinergia: CRSII1_160714) plus ~180'000 CHF for the extension
- Project leader: Elisabeth Stark (estark@rom.uzh.ch)
- Involved Universities:
    - Zurich: Elisabeth Stark, Christa Dürscheid
    - Bern: Crispin Thurlow, Silvia Natale
    - Neuchâtel: Federica Diémoz†
    - Leipzig: Beat Siebenhaar
    - Project duration: 36 months (1/1/2016 – 31/12/2018) plus an extension until early 2020

Overall Research Questions:

1. What do Swiss WhatsApp messages look like? What has changed overall between Swiss SMS and Swiss WhatsApp messages, and why (as regards linguistic structures, use of images in a broad sense, spelling, register-specific style, individualization vs. accommodation)?
2. What is said / done by the individual users and the media in/on WhatsApp messages and chats, in relation to the findings for question 1?

Subprojects: The project consisted of four subprojects:

- A: Language(s) of WhatsApp: Verbal Periphrases and Argument Drop
- B: Language Design in WhatsApp: Icono/Graphy
- C: Individuals in WhatsApp
- D: The Cultural Discourses and Social Meanings of Mobile Communication

Subproject A: Language(s) of WhatsApp: Verbal Periphrases and Argument Drop

Two optional salient linguistic structures in French, (Swiss) German, Italian (and partially Romansh) WhatsApp messages were investigated: argument drop (already investigated in the SMS project), and the use of progressive verbal periphrases, in order to find out whether these structures are register-specific features (in the sense of Biber 1995) or mainly technologically provoked structures.

- Lead: Elisabeth Stark (Zurich), Silvia Natale (Bern)
- Doctoral students: Franziska Stuntebeck, Rossella Maraffino

Subproject B: Language Design in WhatsApp: Icono/Graphy

This subproject looked at varying spelling strategies, and especially new sets of iconographic signs (emojis) across linguistic communities, as well as the specific function of these in shaping communicative identity.

- Lead: Christa Dürscheid (Zurich), Federica Diémoz† (Neuchâtel)
- Postdocs: Christina Siever, Etienne Morel, Silvia Natale

Subproject C: Individuals in WhatsApp

This project set its research the focus on individual variation by investigating the features analysed in sub-projects A and B plus patterns of code-switching as variables at the level of the individual rather than the sociolinguistically defined group, focusing on Swiss German dialects and patterns of accommodation in interaction.

- Lead: Beat Siebenhaar (Leipzig)
- Doctoral student: Samuel Felder

Subproject D: The Cultural Discourses and Social Meanings of Mobile Communication

This project described and analysed the public discourse on graphic mobile communication via WhatsApp (and SMS), trying to pin down the way Switzerland looks at the revolutionary developments in our communicative behaviour and its evaluation by the media. It created the Digital Discourse Database with entries from 117 newspapers from 16 countries in English, French, German, Spanish. The data was collected between 2014-2018.

- Lead: Crispin Thurlow (Bern)
- Doctoral student: Vanessa Jaroski

Publications

You find all output from our project in the p3-database (SNSF): http://p3.snf.ch/project-160714

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