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Preface: THE LANGUAGE OF PANDEMICS

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Topic: *The language of Pandemics*
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During this year 2020, all of us in the ESJ Family are celebrating the ESJ 10th anniversary. When I was asked to edit a special edition, at first, I was reluctant, because I really did not know what to propose. During those months, the whole world was in total lockdown and the only communication means were our telephones and computers. I did all my university lessons online, all the institutional meetings online, I even met many of my students online. Therefore, being forced to stay home, I decided to start this task that was unknown to me and wonder into the Language of Pandemics. I invited some of my dearest Colleagues, and some of them accepted to participate with me in this unique experience; unique because I hope that we will not have the chance again to live such an experience as the one we are living during these strange days.

The coronavirus pandemic has abruptly changed our lives. Suddenly, our life modes were frozen and petrified into shapes that were unknown to us. The cities were deserted; we were all locked down in our houses with our beliefs, ideas, thoughts, joys and fears. In these peculiar, unusual, unnatural conditions, we have all found out that we are susceptible, liable and fragile. We have discovered internal resources never seen before, but that the support of our family and friends is crucial. We have realized that we are humane! Language is the most human characteristics, and during this pandemic, language has been proclaimed and elevated to its natural status: as the only means human beings have to stay in touch with, share and participate in each other's lives. Sharing and participation have been possible thanks to the Internet and all the technological devices that have become extensions of our bodies.

To date Covid-19 is still spreading easily and sustainably in all communities ("community spread") all over the world. Community spread is referred to as airborne transmission, representing an important way of transmission of infectious diseases like tuberculosis, measles, and chicken pox, through which a group of people get infected with a virus or bacterium in a precise area (WHO, 2020). Covid-19 infection is spread by exposure to the virus through small droplets and particles produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes; these droplets can linger in the air for minutes to hours and can move for distances up to 2 meters. After infection with Covid-19, symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure to the virus, and can range from mild illness to severe disease. The main symptoms reported are:

fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle and body aches, headache, loss of taste and smell, sore throat, congestion, runny nose, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea. These are mild symptoms that are present in most of the people affected by Covid-19 infection. However, a certain amount of people experience more severe symptoms like: trouble breathing, persistent pain or pressure in the chest, confusion, inability to wake or stay awake, bluish lips or face (Wiersinga, 2020). These latter patients need emergency care, and this is one of the main reasons why this pandemic is so alarming, because intensive care units in hospitals in almost all countries in the world are not equipped to receive such a great number of patients simultaneously. Covid-19 pandemic has certainly lead many policy makers in many countries to revise and reset their healthcare systems in terms of both human resources and facilities, because for the first time, the ‘modern’ world was found to be unfit to face such a medical emergency (WHO, 2020).

In these somewhat ‘exceptional’ conditions medical knowledge transmission and spreading is crucial, especially because people need to be not only informed about the facts surrounding the disease and its spread, but they primarily need to be reassured (Cloitre and Shinn, 1985). Indeed, the issue of knowledge and communication in medicine is certainly a serious one, and during this pandemic medical communication is taking place at different levels starting from the World Health Organization, passing through the different health ministries and commissions in all countries, and ending with doctors and journalists (Gumperz, 1999). Therefore, medical communication has many different features and facets, including a great variety of text and discourse genres. The progenitor of all these genres is certainly the research articles reporting scientific medical research and clinical trials in all the different branches (from human physiology to pediatrics, from cardiac to orthopedic surgery, from dermatology to psychiatry, etc.). Scientific medical research involves also epidemiological studies, and diagnostic, pharmacological and treatment investigations. Moreover, other genres include forms of professional communication like all forms of doctor-patient interactions, and finally, all journalistic genres, both oral (i.e. TV, the Internet, etc.) and written (WHO and government reports, newspapers, magazines, etc.) that have been widely used during this 2020 pandemic.

The papers in this Special Issue use a variety of research methods and they all describe with different angles and different viewpoints this exceptional human condition. Furthermore, this Special Issue is aimed at highlighting language in all its aspects and especially as a communication and an exchange tool during this historical period. Indeed, the Issue starts with the article by Barbara CAPPUZZO who discusses about the importance of English language as the language of the world, and about the ways the pandemic outbreak has affected our lives, the way we talk and the way we conceive the world. She debates on how a number of Anglicisms have become fully part of the lexicon of Italian language, traditionally being open to foreign words. According to her investigation, Covid-19-related Anglicisms are used in Italian to such an extent that we can reasonably refer to them as the ‘language of pandemic’, with numerous English words and expressions employed in Italian. CAPPUZZO carries out a 69,726-word corpus of 63 articles taken from *la Repubblica.it* throughout March 2020. The word *lockdown* was analyzed in order to scrutinize how the term was employed in one of the most authoritative and influential Italian newspapers. She concludes that the term was often used together with its Italian equivalents mainly to fulfil the pragmatic/stylistic need to avoid lexical repetition. Moreover, *lockdown* appeared as an all-inclusive term, encompassing various connotations of meaning which did not always seem to be fully and correctly conveyed by its Italian counterparts. Renzo MOCINI’s article continues the investigation into the peculiarities of the language used during this Covid-19 pandemic. More specifically he analyzes the ways the World Health Organization (WHO), which represents an authoritative voice in health issues, has managed communication and information transfer to the laypersons during this 2020 pandemic. He continues that since the recent Covid-19 pandemic outbreak, an *infodemic* has occurred, conveying an overabundance of information, in which separation of the ‘wheat from the chaff’ and true from fake news is extremely difficult. MOCINI’s paper focuses on carrying out a semio-linguistic analysis in an effort to explore the communicative traits of the *communiqués* issued by WHO. To this end, he explores all linguistic and discursive strategies used to foster an impression of truthfulness and create trust regarding the information concerning the Coronavirus pandemic. MOCINI’s analysis highlights the interplay of *simulacra* and semantic

configurations functional to the ‘discursive efficiency’ of the official statements of the WHO. The article by Stefania CICILLINI and Antonella Maria GIACOSA is the perfect example of how our professional and teaching experiences have been so diversified during this period, forcing us to change all our teaching habits and find new strategies to keep our students glued to their computers and listen to us. Indeed, both lecturers and students had to become familiar with online education and had to interact and communicate digitally to replace face-to-face interaction. CICILLINI and GIACOSA highlight how, in this context Emergency Remote Education (ERE) emerged as a branch of distance learning concerning the unplanned response to an educational emergency. They share their experience with using a task that is particularly challenging for both students and lecturers involved in English-medium instruction (EMI) degree programs. In Italy such programs are completely taught in English, feature a diverse student population, and are often characterized by issues relating to English proficiency, interaction and communication. CICILLINI and GIACOSA address the ways in which lecturers and students of EMI courses in Medical and Nursing Schools from several Italian universities have coped with the sudden changes in the teaching mode due to the passage from classroom to screen. They carried out a collection of data, both quantitative and qualitative, using questionnaires filled in by lecturers and students of EMI degree programmes taught in 14 Italian universities. Their results show the changes EMI courses in Medical and Nursing Schools underwent during the lockdown and the lecturers’ and students’ satisfaction concerning interaction and ERE classes. On the other hand, their results help identify key elements and strategies that can contribute to improve EMI remote education so that it is promoted from ERE to quality distance learning. The present Special Edition ends with my paper, which carries out a textual, discourse and semantic analysis of the song *Entangled*, a masterpiece by the English band Genesis. The song describes a patient living in a dream-like state, having many similarities and parallels with the state of being affected by Covid-19 and experiencing the worst manifestations of the disease. The most overt message deriving from analyzing the words and the discourse in *Entangled* is the prevailing-type pattern that evidences the strong imbalance existing in a relationship between a doctor and a patient. The inaffable music and voices join in a coral-like song that seems to have links with serenades, charms,

prayers, and with unknown dimensions. The enchanting images produced by *Entangled* evoke a calm, dream-like state where the listener is carried inside the soft ripples of the rhymes and verses that combine and overlap perfectly with the flowing rhythm and the purely magical music.

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