SEM27. Revisiting affect: The emotional turn in discourse analysis in the age of technologies. Linguistic, intercultural and translation perspectives

27A   12 September h. 14:00-16:00, S3 Moro
27B   12 September h. 16:30-19:00, S3 Moro
27C   13 September h. 8:30-11:00, S3 Moro

Convenors
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Abstract
Emotions play a fundamental role in the state of being human and being humane; so they inevitably filter – whether implicitly or explicitly – into language and account for a huge part of human interaction through discourse. Emotions influence how individuals and groups relate to one another, driving mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. Given their centrality to human interaction, emotions – often referred to in their complex as 'affect' – have increasingly attracted scholarly attention across various disciplines, including sociology, visual analysis, linguistic anthropology, and ethnography (cf. Mackenzie & Alba-Juez, 2019; Milani & Richardson, 2021; Scherer et al., 2001). This growing interest has contributed to what social and cultural theorists describe as the 'affective turn' (Clough, 2007).

In the more linguistically-oriented area of discourse studies, however, emotions seem to have received comparatively less attention. Even within the Appraisal model (Martin & White, 2005), which has been instrumental in highlighting the role of emotions in linguistic communication, 'affect' – the linguistic resources used to convey emotional reactions – has been somewhat overshadowed by other analytical categories which are now well-established and more extensively relied on (e.g. attitude, engagement, appreciation, graduation, etc.). Yet, the study of emotions in discourse is more essential than ever, particularly in technology-mediated communication, where profiling and algorithm-driven content curation ensure that contents proposed are in line with the reader's preferences, creating a sort of emotion-driven loop. Moreover, the increasingly multimodal nature of communication, where concise textual content is often paired with images, relies on emotions as cognitive shortcuts, conveying meaning in ways that would otherwise require more elaborate and more explicit reasoning. The study of linguistic resources involved in the encoding of affect, as the direct expression of emotional responses, is key to promoting an awareness that can help foster a more humane approach to communication. In today's digital and multimodal landscape, it provides linguistic resources that enable writers and speakers to express empathy and respect diverse perspectives.

Building on these insights, this seminar explores the emotive dimension of meaning, i.e. affect, in Discourse Analysis and related disciplines, and in Rhetoric/Argumentation studies (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1956; van Eemeren, 2010), in a context where research has often tended to focus more on the negotiation of values than on the encoding of emotions for expressive and/or perlocutionary purposes. This involves testing theoretical constructs and analytical tools for identifying and interpreting emotional elements in discourse, while also examining case studies across various domains and genres where such elements can be identified. These include social media, corporate communication, scientific research articles, conference presentations, journalism, and political debates, etc., particularly when dealing with critical issues such as climate change, trade policies, war and conflict, vaccination, and other socially and politically charged topics.

Contributions will be welcome especially, although not exclusively, on the following topics:
- Affect in public discourse (political, institutional, media, etc.)
- Emotional resources in public debates on sensitive issues (migration, climate change, race and ethnicity, etc.)
- Affect in specialized discourse (scientific, technological and popularizing)
- Affect in legal discourse (judgements, pleadings, etc.)
- Encoding of emotions in movie dialogue and in its translation (dubbing, subtitling)
- Affect in an intercultural perspective and its translation
- Affect model refinements (or reappraisal)
- Emotions, argumentation and persuasion
- Affective engagement of the audience
- Triggers of emotion in discourse

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SEM27. Papers

27A   12 September h. 14:00-16:00, S3 Moro
- *The sound of silence: Or, how to deal with the emotional rollercoaster of public speaking in a corporate environment* (Annalisa Zanola, Università degli Studi di Brescia)
- *The emotional appeal in the energy sector* (Olga Denti, Università di Cagliari)
- *A corpus linguistic approach to analyzing empathy* (Sabrina Fusari, Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna)
- *Attitude to AI in healthcare communication: Affect vis-à-vis judgement and appreciation* (Giuliana Elena Garzone (Università IULM, Milano)

27B   12 September h. 16:30-19:00, S3 Moro
- *An evaluation of the discourse on climate change in Great Britain parliamentary corpus ParlaMint-GB, 2015-2021* (Anna Re, Università IULM, Milano)
- *Emotions in argumentative discourse on social media: Two populisms compared* (Chiara Degano, Università di Roma Tre)

27C   13 September h. 8:30-11:00, S3 Moro
- *Promoting emotional self-regulation in the English classroom: A Vygotskyan approach* (Enrico Grazzi, Università di Roma Tre)
- *Translation and affect in the EAP classroom* (Paola Clara Leotta, Università di Catania)
- *Affect in subtitling guidelines: Aligning standards to audience reception on stage and on screen* (Mara Logaldo, Università IULM, Milano)
- *The display of emotions in The Mitchells vs the Machines: Translating family conflicts in the Italian dubbed version* (Mariacristina Petillo, Università degli Studi di Bari Aldo Moro)
- *Affective translation: Language as embodied performance* (Fernanda Verçosa, Università degli Studi di Enna "Kore")

SEM27. Abstracts

Emotions in argumentative discourse on social media: Two populisms compared
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The investigation of emotions in discourse is gathering momentum due to the enhanced role they play in contemporary 'phatic culture' driven by social-media (Miller 2008: 398), and more generally in online communication steered by algorithms, where contents are recommended based on the user's preferences, and platform design favours polarization of views and feelings. Recent research on human emotions in discourse sees them as embracing aspects such as appraising a situation, forming expectations about the emotions caused in the hearer, the common-ground of the interlocutors, emotive bodily behaviour, the polarity of the emotion (Alba-Juez/Mackenzie 2019: 16).

Even the traditionally logic-oriented argumentation theory has progressively paved the way for the inclusion of an emotive component. The pragma-dialectical notion of engaged (as opposed to detached) argumentative style (van

Eemeren et al. 2022), the studies of multimodal arguments, with their heightened connotative mechanisms, role of emotions in argumentation has been explored also through scientific experiments (Cfr. among others Benlamine et al 2015).

This paper explores the linguistic instruments that are used in the deployment of emotions in argumentation. In particular, it aims to see if and to what extent the category of affect as construed in the Model of *appraisal* (Martyn and White 2005) – the most comprehensive approach to the interpersonal aspects of discourse – can account for the expression of emotions. It will do so identifying Tweets with an argumentative component in which emotions are openly expressed or otherwise conveyed or elicited, comparing the profiles of U.S. president Donald Trump and Sen. Bernie Sanders, taken respectively as representative of right- and left-wing populism in U.S. politics.

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The emotional appeal in the energy sector
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Disclosing information is one of the most important aspects of corporate communication as it contributes to creating and developing the company's image, reliability, reputation and social responsibility.

Emotions are social and interpersonal phenomena, embedded within a specific society and culture. They are critical in the understanding and construction of relationships. Spontaneous expressions of emotions may alternate with strategic emotional displays aiming at mitigating the real sentiment (Langlotz & Locher 2013).

The company implements actions to bridge the gap between stakeholders' expectations and corporate perceived identity, through transparency and the identification of stakeholders' positive and negative attitude towards the firm (Piechocki 2004). To do so, it appeals to emotions, employing pathos-based rhetorical strategies in its communication. Pathos entails emotions, values, beliefs, feelings, and passions. Thus, it is used to persuade by appealing to empathy, sympathy, curiosity, anger, and triggering actions and reactions.

The present paper analyses, both qualitatively and quantitatively (through Sketch Engine) the persuasive effect of metadiscourse and the rhetorical affective appeal of pathos in the webpages and the reports on sustainability and equality, diversity and inclusion, of a corpus of energy sector companies. It focuses on Hyland's (2005) five sub-categories of interactional resources: hedges, boosters, attitude markers (also Mur-Dueñas 2010), pronouns (Liu & Zhang 20221), self-mentions and engagement markers (also Xiaoqin 2017). They incorporate those features employed by companies to connect to their stakeholders, and recognise their presence as discourse participants (Denti & Giordano 2024; Giordano 2024).

Findings show that while some companies build trust by focusing on their commitment, active role, performance, and achievements to be sustainable and respect people and the environment, others rely on their cultural values and traditions, respect and care for people, nature and the community. While some firms pursue a closer relationship by conveying personal judgements and emotions, others prefer being concise and objective.

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A corpus linguistic approach to analyzing empathy
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This paper presents a multi-year corpus linguistic study of the word "empathy" (Fusari, in print 2025), aimed at investigating its centrality to the discourse of both social and individual well-being today, and at shedding light on whether "empathy" is just a "buzzword" in many areas of contemporary discourse, or a fundamental resource to be deployed to achieve better relations among humans, and between humans and the environment.

Methodologically, the study relies on both corpus-based and corpus-driven tools (McEnery, Xiao and Tono 2006; Baker and Egbert 2016) and a systemic functional lexicogrammatical formalism (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004). The context of use of the word "empathy" is analyzed in a large electronic corpus, English Web 2020 (about 36 billion words), available in Sketch Engine (Kilgarriff et al. 2014), from the ideational (focusing on Transitivity and noun group structure), interpersonal (focusing on evaluative language) and textual (focusing on non-structural cohesive devices) points of view. Concordances, wordsketches and other corpus output obtained from Sketch Engine are systematically used, to derive patterns and recurrent phraseologies that may help readers understand what we mean by empathy, whether it is always positive, whether it is learned or innate, and whether it really is "what makes us human" as it is sometimes contended.

Conclusions show that "empathy" has a variety of definitions, many of which are tentative and even apophatic (i.e. achieved through negation, telling us what empathy is not, instead of what it is). This may be problematic, as the lack of a common definition of "empathy" throughout the spectrum of the quite diverse disciplines that use it (e.g. psychology, medicine, sociology, philosophy, cognitive studies, even marketing) is an obstacle not only for research about empathy, but also for its practical use (e.g. measurement), especially for clinical purposes. An agreement on the meaning of empathy is preliminary to studying it from all angles, eventually allowing professional training courses to teach empathy in workplaces where it is increasingly considered as a highly desirable vocational skill. Therefore, empathy deserves more attention in all areas that assign it a pivotal role, from the clinical to the psychological and philosophical, including language and discourse, to open up new avenues of research into the understanding of emotions as well as in the use of inclusive language.

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Attitude to AI in healthcare communication: Affect vis-à-vis judgement and appreciation
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Despite its demonstrable benefits, artificial intelligence (AI) continues to evoke a complex spectrum of emotional responses – from optimism and awe to anxiety and distrust – often possibly rooted in the public's limited understanding of AI's inner workings and broader implications. This ambiguity becomes particularly salient in sensitive domains such as healthcare, where the adoption of AI is accelerating. In this emotionally charged context, media discourse – across print, broadcast, and digital platforms – plays a central role in shaping public sentiment, frequently embedding affective cues that extend beyond technical evaluations.

This paper investigates how AI in healthcare, particularly within the context of doctor-patient interaction, is discursively constructed in media communication. It starts from the assumption that media portrayals are seldom neutral, instead reflecting and shaping collective emotional orientations (Lupton, 2014; Topol, 2019). To explore this, a small ad hoc corpus of media texts has been compiled, featuring diverse representations of AI in clinical and caregiving settings.

The analysis is grounded in the Appraisal framework developed by Martin and White (2001), with a particular focus on the *Attitude* system, discussing the relative role of its three main components – *Affect* (resources for construing emotional reactions), *Judgement* (evaluations of ethics and behaviour), and *Appreciation* (aesthetic and value assessments) – to understand how media discourse balances emotional appeal with reasoned evaluation.(cf. e.g. Bednarek, 2006).

While all three dimensions are examined, special attention is given to *Affect*, which captures the emotional tonality embedded in discourse. This focus highlights how the media channel collective hopes, anxieties, and ambivalences regarding AI, and how these emotional appeals intersect with rational evaluations to produce narratives that are as affective as they are informative.

The study addresses two main research questions: (1) What is the relative prominence of the emotional component in media representations of the current and future role of AI in healthcare? (2) How is the perceived transformation or "erosion" of the "humane" dimension of medical care, due to the integration of AI, linguistically constructed?

By tracing patterns of affective vs rational representation, the paper aims to illuminate how media discourse not only informs but also shapes public and professional imaginaries of AI in healthcare.

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Promoting emotional self-regulation in the English classroom: A Vygotskyan approach
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This presentation introduces a central concept from Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (SCT), *perezhivanie*, that is: "How a child becomes aware of, interprets, [and] emotionally relates to a certain event." (Vygotsky, 1994: 341). I am going to discuss this concept, a propos of the development of high-school learners' emotional self-regulation through literature education, in the English classroom.

The rationale behind the innovative tasks I designed for this purpose is that through learners' cooperative reflection on the identities of fictional characters and on their conflictual relationships (i.e., *dramatic events*, in a Vygotskyan perspective), it is possible to make students experience social drama. This, in turn, is supposed to lead the class towards a deeper understanding not only of other people's perceptions, but also of the way their beliefs, emotions, dispositions, etc. motivate and explain their actions. This approach illuminates how students' participation in group activities and the use of English as a meaningful symbolic resource may foster distinct capabilities that include ways of perceiving the world around us and interacting with it.

In May 2025, I was invited by a school principal and a teacher of English to carry out a workshop on *perezhivanie*, for a class of fifth graders. The aim of this initiative was to enhance learners' emotional intelligence through a set of purposely designed drama activities, based on an extract from Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, a novel they were studying as part of their English syllabus.

This workshop, which drew on Di Pietro's *Strategic Interaction* (1987), was intended to lead the class through a set of guided exercises, culminating in the performance of *scenarios* (Di Pietro, 1987, p. 41), i.e. the strategic "interplay of roles functioning to fulfill personal agendas within a shared context." The main purposes of this experience were:

a)   Make learners develop a deep understanding of the characters involved in the extract they were going to adapt for their performance, first of all by reflecting on Shelley's text. Indeed, it is through language that literary characters reveal their different *perezhivaniye* and how their personalities develop and change through dramatic events.

b)   Make learners perform Shelley's characters and, through the use of English, stir and control their emotional reactions.

c)   Make learners reflect on the use of English in literary texts to make readers perceive the value of their emotional response.

The theoretical rationale for this workshop was based on the transactional theory of development: working on Shelley's text was expected to activate participants' imagination in order to expand their experience of self-consciousness. This would eventually stimulate learners' awareness of the value of emotional expression to better mediate the social relationships with themselves and the others.

I will conclude my presentation with a look to the potential of this experience, especially as regards the area of teacher development programs.

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Translation and affect in the EAP classroom
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This research focuses on the role of the translator's *affect* and emotions (Koskinen 2020) in the Italian translation of Oliver Sacks' *Gratitude* (2015, translated by Isabella C. Blum, 2016), a poignant collection of essays as a diary-like testament.

The source-target text analysis is conducted through Kwiecinski's method (2001) and the T-lab software (Lancia, 2012). The target text is then compared to a version belonging to collaborative text mediation practice (Nikitina 2022) by non-native students of English for Psychological Studies enrolled at the University of Catania, Italy.

Results show that the translator's "affect" is a key factor that influences and shapes the degree of fidelity in translating Sacks' emotions, including specific terms, key concepts, and syntactic structures retained (i.e.," yarmulke," "Shabbos," and "gefilte fish"), with adaptations made only where necessary to ensure cultural and linguistic coherence.

As for the second target text, instead, on the one hand, the empowering potential is shown of Machine Translation (MT) collaborative-text-mediation practices for non–native students of Psychology (looking at diary translation as an affective, emotional practice), on the other hand, the "affective turn" (Koskinen 2020) that is a dimension of human translation, is absent in the MT output, even if including interesting solutions belonging to the collaborative activity conducted by students.

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Affect in subtitling guidelines: Aligning standards to audience reception on stage and on screen
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Initially conducted as part of the ongoing project "(Trans)National European Theatre: audiovisual tools and simultaneous interpreting for the internationalisation of theatre production and consumption" (TraNET - CREA-CULT-2023-COOP), involving audience surveys and the development of guidelines based on the live surtitling and on the integrated, multilingual subtitling for the theatre plays streamed live and subsequently uploaded on the project website (https://tra-net.eu/), this study expands its scope to existing guidelines for broadcast subtitled media contained in the ESIST (European Association for Studies in Screen Translation) corpus and in the European Accessibility Act, which will come into force in June 2025. The aim is to compare the results of the empirical research work with the analysis of the official guidelines. The corpus will be explored through the lenses of Appraisal Theory, with particular emphasis on Affect - "resources for construing emotional reactions" (Martin & White, 2005: 35) - and the alignment between standards and audience reception. Attention will be paid to policies concerning cultural adaptation, readability, narrative significance, thematic coding of affect through text and subtext, and inclusivity as a way to ensure an emotionally resonant viewing experience. The investigation is relevant to the conference theme as it fosters discussion on a more humane and equitable media landscape, highlighting diversity for an authentic representation of audiences and the need to harmonise accessibility requirements.

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The display of emotions in *The Mitchells vs the Machines*: Translating family conflicts in the Italian dubbed version
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The aim of this paper is to focus on the animated science fiction film, *The Mitchells vs The Machines*, distributed by Netflix in 2021, to explore its language of emotions and some communicative patterns within the Mitchells family. This road comedy has at the core of its plot the rebellion of PAL, an AI smartphone digital assistant that turns bad after being defined "obsolete" by his human creator, tech entrepreneur Mark Bowman. The theme of the machines rising up against human beings is not a cinematic novelty (Murphy 2024), but what is new in this film is the role played by the Mitchells, a highly dysfunctional family that will save the world from a throng of destructive robots controlled by PAL. Due to complicated family relations – especially between Katie, a somewhat bizarre teenager aspiring to become a filmmaker, who often clashes with her technophobic father Rick because of her choice to enrol in a film school in California – the film presents some interesting food for thought on the display of emotions in conflict family situations. More specifically, the contribution will firstly investigate how the conversational maxims theorised by Herbert Paul Grice in 1975 are often flouted by characters during emotionally tense verbal exchanges, thus producing ineffective conversation. Secondly, the Italian dubbed version of the film will be analysed in order to compare the rendering of emotional language in confrontational dialogues, for the purpose of verifying whether source and target texts show the same perception of emotions, or whether dubbing choices lead to a different linguistic representation into Italian.

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An evaluation of the discourse on climate change in Great Britain parliamentary corpus ParlaMint-GB, 2015-2021
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The global conversation on climate change has become one of the most urgent and contested areas of political and public discourse. The way political actors, media outlets, and the public communicate about climate change plays a vital role in shaping policy, public opinion, and collective action (Nerlich, Koteyko 2009). Appraisal Theory (Martin and White 2005; Martin, Rose 2007) can offer a powerful framework for analyzing how speakers and writers construct meaning, express values, and position themselves and others in political climate change debates. Through its three subsystems – Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation – Appraisal Theory can enable a nuanced understanding of the evaluative and rhetorical strategies used in climate change discourse (Martin and White 2005). Through Attitude, it reveals emotional and ethical framings; through Engagement, it shows how voices are legitimized or marginalized; and through Graduation, it highlights rhetorical intensity and urgency. These dimensions are crucial in a political context where public understanding and policy action are shaped as much by rhetoric as by empirical data.

The presentation will analyse how the concept of climate change is conceptualized in British parliamentary debates as presented in the Great Britain parliamentary corpus ParlaMint-GB, 2015-2021 available on Sketch Engine (ParlaMint 2.1, CoNLL format, wordcount: 100,967,492) **(**Kilgarriff 2014**)**. The analysis will first identify meaningful words and phrases using the tools offered by Sketch Engine and then analyse them using Appraisal Theory. The aim is to unpack emotional appeals, judgments of responsibility, and the rhetorical force behind discourses on climate change which frequently show rich use of Affect, Judgment, and Graduation strategies to persuade, inform, or alarm. As climate change continues to dominate the global agenda, the analytical tools offered by Appraisal Theory can be beneficial for promoting transparency, accountability, and informed engagement (Keller, C. et alts 2011).

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Affective translation: Language as embodied performance
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Set in Belfast during the early 1970s, at the height of the Troubles, Owen McCafferty's play *Mojo Mickybo* stages the fleeting friendship between two young boys—one Protestant, one Catholic—whose bond is ultimately fractured by the historical and political violence surrounding them. In relocating the play to São Paulo under Brazil's military dictatorship, I engage with translation not as an act of equivalence but as a site of affective, embodied, and ideological engagement. Through this process, translation becomes anthropophagic: a conscious devouring of the foreign not for imitation but for transformation, metabolising it into something culturally specific, affectively resonant, and politically charged within the Brazilian context.

In adapting *Mojo Mickybo* for a Brazilian audience, I draw on the theoretical frameworks of Bertolt Brecht's Epic Theatre and Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed—both of which treat performance as a space of estrangement, rupture, and activation rather than representation. These theatrical paradigms foreground the audience not as passive receivers of meaning but as active participants in its construction and in transforming their environment. Here, affect is reconfigured not as sentimental residue but as a cognitive force capable of fostering not only empathy, but also critical awareness and distance, ultimately leading to change. In Boal's sense, this is not about purging emotion but channeling it: from recognition to action, from passivity to intervention.

This paper ultimately calls for a rethinking of the translator's role—not as a transparent conduit but as an embodied political subject whose decisions are grounded in lived experience and driven by a cause. Translation, in this sense, is neither invisible nor objective; it is somatic and situated. Drawing from affect theory and neuroscience, I argue that the translator's ideosomatic and idiosomatic responses are central to how texts come alive in new settings. What emerges is a holistic practice of translation—one that allows for the haunting of memory, the urgency of voice, and the political force of feeling to shape the contours of discourse.

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The sound of silence: Or, how to deal with the emotional rollercoaster of public speaking in a corporate environment

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The role of public speaking as a skill required in business environments has been a recurring theme in numerous blogs and websites over the last decades (Zanola, 2011a). Beyond providing general descriptions of the emotions experienced by orators when speaking in public, websites offer no scientifically relevant insights (Bodie, 2010). Despite the extensive research that has been conducted on the subject of public speaking from rhetorical and political perspectives (Cooperman and Lull, 2008), or from the perspective of conversational analysis (see Atkinson, 1984), this topic has received limited attention in relation to the emotional impact of oral argumentation in corporate communication. The adjacent areas that have been explored over the past decades include the genres of "conference presentations" (Carter-Thomas, Rowley-Jolivet, 2003) and "presidential debates" (Bendinelli, 2011).

Emotion is increasingly recognised as a critical component of the persuasive process, embedded within oral performance. This assertion is supported by extant research on the manner in which entrepreneurs communicate in public settings (Zanola, Palermo, 2013). Based on the considerations above, it can be argued that the deliberate use of oral argument and emotional language is a new challenge for entrepreneurs operating in international business contexts where English is the primary lingua franca.

Focusing on the role of pauses in the construction of oral argumentation in different business contexts (the meeting with or between employees, the boardroom, the negotiations, to name but a few), the work focuses on how silence, in Cicero's words, is one of the most powerful tools of rhetoric (Jaworski, 1993). From its acoustic definition, to its functional definition, to the concepts of *silence-absence* and *silence-to-communication*, a corpus of examples attesting to the fundamental role of pause in real prosodic contexts highlights a number of functions that can be subjectively assumed by the speaker in professional business contexts.

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