

Shifting the landscape of language work? Social media influencers as new-generation copywriters

In this presentation, I will report the findings of a larger discourse-ethnographic study of social media influencers (SMIs) as new-generation copywriters. Located at the intersection of critical sociolinguistics and digital discourse studies, my study considers the extent to which SMIs disrupt conventional practices of advertising (cf. Thurlow, 2020, 2018). The empirical basis of my presentation will be seven semi-structured interviews with SMIs combined with insights drawn from industry publications and practitioner commentary in videos posted by SMIs on YouTube. My analysis focuses on stancetaking in SMIs' metadiscursive commentary: the ways they frame their work and position themselves vis-à-vis other kinds of work and workers. As such, I am interested in the types of symbolic meanings – and value – that they attach to their work and professional selves. It is through this discursive work that they create 'distinction' from other (language) workers and construct what Bourdieu (1993) might call a 'professional field'. In fact, this paper considers their attempts to claim symbolic capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2013) in an industry where the processes in place to create legitimacy or prestige are sparse in comparison to other cultural industries. In doing so, I pinpoint how SMIs have shifted core advertising practices, yet fall short of radically changing the wider political and symbolic economies of digital media or language work.

References

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