

5th Cultural Linguistics International Conference 2025

Theme session

1. Session **title**: The biographer's voice in English (auto-)biographical narratives of past female childhoods.
2. Name and affiliation of the theme session **organizer**
Paloma Tejada Caller
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3. **Introduction** of approximately 400-500 words explaining the theme session

The aim of this session is to bring together different cultural-linguistic aspects concerning the voice of the biographer in the construction of an apparently overlooked life-stage using a bottom-up approach. The adequacy of the session in the context of CLIC25 may be justified on the following grounds: a) low attention has been devoted to childhood and the younger years as a cultural category in social and linguistic studies; this level becomes even lower when the focus is laid on women (King 2007, Frijhoff 2012, Pomeranz 2020); b) the cultural construction of childhood extends to perceptions of this age-stage in the past (King 2007, among many others); c) in turn, biographical texts and further forms of life-narrative have been proved to exhibit a cultural nature (Daniel 1994; Habermas 2007, Renders 2014, Douglas 2019).

Most of the contributions to this panel will explore the presence of the biographer as it emerges from real discourse comprised in dictionaries of (national) biography, namely, The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, The Australian Dictionary of Biography, The Dictionary of Irish biography, The Dictionary of Canadian Biography/Dictionnaire biographique du Canada and the Diccionario biográfico electrónico de la Real Academia de la Historia. More precisely, they will explore whether the voice of the biographer may be tracked in life narratives that would arguably be closest to the conventional prototype of objective and factual life-account by an invisible and quasi-anonymous author (Carvalho et al 2010, Celik 2019). It is hypothesized that the apparently disruptive occurrence of the biographer's voice in dictionaries of biography might become a necessary feature when dealing with the early years of female biographees. On the one hand, as childhood in general, and female childhood in particular, has been a most neglected stage of life, apparently knotted to the private sphere, unrelated to agency, and often marked by a lack of data, the biographer's voice might emerge more visibly, out of a need of speculation about what happened. That is, there may be linguistic resources outlining the speaker's view on the truth of a proposition or the desirability or necessity of an event or state to occur. On the other hand, past childhoods being culturally different from contemporary western ones, the biographer might consciously or unconsciously express their emotional reactions to an event or state, be it surprise, unexpectedness, satisfaction, dissatisfaction, luck or misfortune (see Tejada, López Narváez and Fernández Soriano's contribution).

Moreover, it may be the case that the corpus used contributes more than one narrative of the same female life by different authors belonging to different periods

in history. In these cases, the biographer's voice may be recognized in the selection and reinterpretation of contents. Relevant facts about female childhood will likely differ according to both different sensitivities about the early years and different genre patterns of what a biography should look like (see Rodríguez Redondo).

Furthermore, following this last line, biographical writing patterns and genre conventions may vary across languages. Consequently, it seems relevant to explore whether the biographer's voice may exhibit a different degree of naturalness in separate genre traditions and norms (See García Atance).

In contrast with the previous issues, all of them closer to a collective and supposedly uninvolved picture of female childhoods, researchers will lastly analyse the voice of the author in an autobiographical account, necessarily more subjective in nature, where the childhood years of a Scottish woman are tackled from a twofold perspective, fluctuating between emotion and detachment (See Dossena and Calvo Cortés).

4. References:

Daniel, M. (1994). Biography as a Cultural Discipline. In: Daniel, M., Embree, L. (eds) *Phenomenology of the Cultural Disciplines. Contributions to Phenomenology*, vol 16. Springer, Dordrecht.

Carvalho, a. M.; Silva, L. C. S.; Silva, A. A. P. 2010. Modelo didático do gênero biografia como instrumento para a elaboração de uma sequência didática. In: Encontro de produção e tecnologia, 5., 2010, Campo Mourão. Anais. Campo Mourão: Fecilcam. s/p.

Çelik, Ö. (2019). A Genre Analysis of Biography Texts on the IMDB website. *Language Value*, 11, 1-22.

Douglas, Kate and Ashley Barnwell, eds. 2019. *Research Methodologies for Auto/Biography studies*. New York, Routledge

Frijhoff, W. (2012). Historian's discovery of childhood. *Paedagogica Historica*, 48(1), 11-29.

Habermas, T. (2007). How to tell a life: The development of the cultural concept of biography across the lifespan. *Journal of Cognition and Development*, 8, 1-31.

King, M. L. (2007). Concepts of childhood: What we know and where we might go. *Renaissance Quarterly*, 60(2), 371-407.

Pomerantz, S (2020). "Girlhood Studies" in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood Studies*

Renders, H., & De Haan, B. (Eds.). (2014). *Theoretical Discussions of Biography*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill

ODNB The online *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford DNB)

The *Australian Dictionary of Biography*

McGuire, James [ed.], and James Quinn [ed.], *Dictionary of Irish biography*, online ed., Online: Royal Irish Academy, Cambridge University Press, 2009–present. URL: <<https://www.dib.ie>>.

The Dictionary of Canadian Biography/Dictionnaire biographique du Canada (DCB/DBC)

5. List of the **authors and titles** of three to six individual papers.

- a. Ana Laura Rodríguez Redondo: *Transforming women's childhood: recasting biographical narratives in the ODNB*

- b. Marina Dossena, Nuria Calvo Cortés: *"I Am Woman": The Quest for Justice in the Voice of Elizabeth Storie*
- c. Paloma Tejada, Julia López Narváez, Blanca Fernández Soriano: *The Biographer's Lens: stance and intensifying adverbs in the construction of female childhood across borders.*
- d. Miriam Atance Ortal: *Disjuncts in the construction of female lives: English-Spanish in contrast.*