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Age.Vol.A. – Ageing, Volunteers, Assistants. Multilingual Tools for Assisting the Ageing

This paper introduces Age.Vol.A., a recently (2017) funded research project on ageing issues in northern Italy. It concentrates on the demographic and social situation of Varese, an 80,000-inhabitant city in North-West Italy, with 13% of its population over 55 and foreigners representing over 8% of the province's population, a significant proportion of whom are employed as caregivers to assist elderly people at home (Euromonitor International 2015, Provincia di Varese 2017, Urbistat 2017).

Age.Vol.A. starts from the assumption that, between home-assisted Italian seniors and their non-Italian caregivers, there exists a linguistic and cultural barrier as well as a digital divide, which tends to increase the physical and social isolation of the elderly population, even reducing their personal space, e.g. when the home is their only living place but it is co-occupied by a carer who is a foreigner and, due to said linguistic and cultural barriers, also remains a stranger. Such barriers can be removed or at least reduced by creating and introducing multilingual tools (a web portal and a smart device application) aimed at providing the carers with terminology and practical information related to their assisted and the institutions (healthcare systems, health associations, etc.) they usually deal with in the carers' own language(s).

To do so, a thorough study of both the seniors and the caregivers' populations of the territory considered (Varese province) should be first carried out, to hear the voices of both seniors and caregivers discussing the lack of social spaces and the communicative gaps from their own experience and point of view, representing the first output of the project. From this needs analysis, theoretical genres and models of communication will be derived, as a second output. These will be used to design and create the multilingual technological products aimed to assist those who assist the elderly, as a third output. They would contain, divided and organised into different sections, information useful to the carers' profession related to senior services, from health and healthcare to administrative issues. These will include terminological tools like multilingual glossaries, information on public institutions dealing with seniors (office hours, contacts), descriptions of administrative procedures, emergency procedures and contacts – all referring to the local territory. One or more of these sections could also be customisable, e.g. with the assisted family's own contacts and procedures in case of emergency or need. The technological tools would be entirely localised into a number of selected foreign languages, based on those spoken by most foreign caregivers in the Varese province (Provincia di Varese 2017, Urbistat 2017). Finally, the last output provided for by the Age.Vol.A. project is its own dissemination and communication plan. This will include several activities and two specific actions to present, divulge and promote the products among all the stakeholders (such as seniors, Italian and foreign caregivers, local institutions, organisations, associations and entities in general involved in senior care), the academia and the media.

The methodology will be primarily based on Applied Linguistics, particularly Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough 2003; Flowerdew/Richardson 2018), domain-specific discourse (Coupland *et al*. 1991; Clark-Cotton *et al*. 2007; Bait 2009) and Translation Studies (Baker 2010); secondarily, the study will derive methods from social sciences (anthropology and sociology), especially as regards the quantitative tools to be used in describing the populations considered and for data collection and analysis (Agresti/Finlay 2015), and the qualitative framework for interpreting their spatial conditions and communicative needs.

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