

Exploring New Occupational Discourses and Identities across Genres

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Crisis and Well-Being

Edited by

Laura Tommaso

and Marianna Lya Zummo

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—The Editors

INTRODUCTION

LAURA TOMMASO
AND MARIANNA LYA ZUMMO

This collection originates from the DIGRESS (Discourses of Individuals from the Great Resignation: Exploring Social Sustainability) research project, which includes members from the Universities of Milan, Insubria, Palermo, and Eastern Piedmont. Particularly, it stems from a panel, organised by the editors, titled ‘New discourses and re-conceptualisations of profession and (social) position in the face of personal well-being’, held at AIA31 ‘Future Horizons: New Beginnings in English Studies’ 2023 conference, at the University of Calabria, Rende, Italy. The resulting volume brings together contributions from panel participants, DIGRESS research group members, and other scholars. Its primary aim is to advance the understanding of the discourse shaping and constructing contemporary work in times of crisis, which remains the main focus of this book.

From a linguistic perspective, work offers a compelling case study of how language both shapes and reflects broader societal changes. Beyond economic necessity, the workplace serves as a dynamic arena where social identities, power dynamics, and cultural values are continually negotiated and redefined. The way we talk about work—whether in terms of productivity, success, or well-being—reveals much about the shifting ideologies surrounding labour, class, and personal fulfilment. The discursive constructions surrounding work also highlight the emergence of new forms of *trendinisation of youth precariousness* (Castillo-Gonzalez, 2020), where coping strategies, alternative practices and new interpretations of lifestyles are embedded in daily routines. Changes in the world of work are driven by social transformations and evolving negotiations around employment demands. Transitions from temporary employment to fixed-term jobs, earnings, and working hours are linked to new (often individual) reconceptualisations of work-life balance. As the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated, in times of crisis, new narratives emerge to either justify or challenge existing (professional) practices. The unprecedented disruption to traditional job environments and routines forced individuals and organisations

to adapt rapidly, leading to a re-examination of long-held assumptions about the nature of work. Concepts such as ‘remote work’, ‘flexible hours’, and ‘essential services’ came to the forefront, prompting a reassessment of what types of labour are valued and how they are compensated. These new narratives not only questioned the sustainability of certain work models but also highlighted the growing demand for well-being, work-life balance, and equitable treatment in the workplace. These discourses seem to reflect a larger societal shift in how work is conceptualised, not just as a means of economic survival, but as a key component of personal identity, social justice, and quality of life.

This recent reassessment of work has been particularly acute within the Millennials and Generation Z, who have played a pivotal role in challenging traditional professional norms. Unlike previous generations, Millennials — those born between the early 1980s and mid-1990s—entered the workforce during a time of significant economic, technological, and social transformation. Many came of age during the global financial crisis of 2008 or are navigating their careers in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has profoundly influenced their attitudes towards work. Members of younger generations often view work not only as a source of income but also as a key aspect of personal fulfilment and identity. They tend to prioritise values such as flexibility, meaningfulness, and work-life balance over traditional markers of success, such as job security and financial status (Zummo and Tommaso, 2024). In doing so, they challenge the alleged immutability of work ideals, settings, and goals using narratives that rhetorically and strategically enhance a transformative perspective on practices and beliefs. The demands emerging from these narratives seem to be constructed on the grounds of a self-asserted hegemonic position, which these individuals claim they hold. This position is cemented by a newfound, often virtual, group cohesion that strengthens their sense of self-legitimated authority. The pandemic has only intensified this socio-cultural trend, as remote work, burnout, and mental health issues became focal points in public discourse, leading millennials, among others, to further question the sustainability and desirability of long-established work structures (Petersen, 2021). Additionally, this demographic cohort has been at the forefront of advocating for systemic change in the workplace, pushing for greater inclusivity, equity, and transparency. They are more likely to seek employers who align with their personal values, prioritising companies that promote diversity, social responsibility, and employee well-being. This generation is also driving the demand for more fluid career paths, resisting the idea of a linear, lifelong commitment to a single profession in favour of exploring multiple roles or even entrepreneurial ventures.

The ‘reat esignation’ (a term coined by Klotz, as cited in Cohen, 2021)—the economic, social, and cultural phenomenon that has seen unusually high numbers of people voluntarily leaving their jobs—is a vivid example of this shift, with a significant portion of those quitting jobs during the pandemic being Millennials who have sought out opportunities that better align with their personal goals and lifestyles. This phenomenon not only reflects a widespread reassessment of work-life priorities but has also led many individuals, dubbed the ‘great resignees,’ to seek new forms of employment that are less burdensome and more fulfilling, giving rise to a wave of ‘new beginners’ who have re-entered the workforce with fresh perspectives and altered expectations (Klotz, 2022; Coin, 2023). However, this redefinition of work goes beyond simply quitting or switching jobs. In contemporary times, there is a growing recognition of the need for more sustainable, meaningful, and humane approaches to employment. Workers are increasingly advocating for a balance between personal well-being and professional responsibilities, pushing back against traditional notions of career advancement that prioritise financial gain and status over mental health and work-life balance. The rise of remote work, the gig economy, and flexible working arrangements has altered the landscape of employment, empowering individuals to reassess the power dynamics within the workplace and their professional identities. Although the job market is often viewed as an objective reality, characterised by competitiveness in both economic and social terms with similar demands on the working classes, job-related discourses seem to indicate an atomisation of individual desires. Increasingly, public discourse is turning its attention to these shifts, highlighting how diverse personal aspirations and work expectations challenge the conventional, one-size-fits-all approach to employment and career success.

Therefore, while work and post-work in modern society have been extensively studied from economic, social, and cultural perspectives, there remains a significant gap in linguistic research specifically focusing on occupational discourse during times of crisis. This volume aims to address this gap by examining work-related narratives and identities across a range of genres, including news media, social media platforms, and personal accounts. It offers novel linguistic perspectives on this timely field of enquiry in order to track how language constructs and reflects changes in the conceptualisation of work.

The volume opens with a chapter by **Kim Grego**, which offers an in-depth introduction to the DIGRESS research project. Grego not only outlines the foundational rationale behind the project but also presents the multi and interdisciplinary methodology specifically designed to achieve its

objectives. Her chapter highlights the approaches adopted by the research group, showcasing how diverse linguistic perspectives and methodologies have been envisioned to address the research questions. Additionally, it presents the initial findings of the project, offering insights into the early stages of data collection and analysis. Therefore, this opening chapter sets the foundation for the following four contributions, as they align closely with the project's exploration of job-related narratives within the context of the Great Resignation phenomenon.

Marianna Lya Zummo critically analyses the discourse surrounding job-related narratives, through an analysis of Reddit posts and comments about job issues and radical career changes, such as resignations. The chapter maps the boundaries of this digital debate and explores the underlying discursive constructions. Zummo examines how these discussions reshape the conceptualisation of work and its evolving dimensions, particularly regarding expectations, self-care, and personal balance. She argues that while social platforms provide a space for individual expression, they often perpetuate the same capitalist dynamics that workers criticise, reducing systemic labour issues to personal experiences and undermining collective action.

Recognising the crucial role of media in shaping public attitudes towards pressing social issues, **Laura Tommaso**'s chapter aims to offer insights of how the US news media construct the Great Resignation, its causes, and the individuals involved, using a Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies approach. Her analysis reveals that the discourse surrounding the Great Resignation in the US press is shaped by ideological divides. Business-oriented narratives emphasise the operational challenges, while labour-oriented discourses highlight worker empowerment and justice. This dual framing portrays the Great Resignation not just as an economic event, but as a cultural shift with lasting implications for how work is perceived in society, redefining the employer-employee relationship.

Gilberto Giannacchi investigates the discursive construction of 'quiet quitting' (the practice of employees doing only the minimum required in their jobs, without taking on extra duties or going beyond their job description) in recent online magazine and newspaper articles from the US and UK, focusing on the representation of the social actors involved. Across the corpus, quiet quitting is mainly seen as a social media trend, with emphasis on workers' commitment and minimal effort, while overlooking social class and job types. The proposed corpus-assisted analysis reveals that the terms 'employee' and 'worker' are more frequent than 'employer' and 'boss,' reflecting a focus on workers' experiences and potential reluctance to critique employers. The discussion also connects quiet quitting

to pre-existing workforce practices and cultural values, particularly in the US, where hard work and engagement are traditionally emphasised.

Tatiana Canziani's chapter also focuses on quiet quitting, analysing how metaphors—particularly those related to conflict and health—shape its portrayal in online news and HR media. These metaphors often cast the trend in a negative light, likening it to an enemy or a disease. To illustrate her point, Canziani argues that the term 'epidemic', among others, can evoke harmful associations from the COVID-19 pandemic, potentially stigmatising quiet quitters. Her chapter suggests that while metaphors can simplify complex topics, they should be used cautiously to avoid causing harm or perpetuating stigma.

The chapter by **Siria Guzzo** and **Giulia Pepe** broadens the contextual, methodological and genre boundaries addressed in this edited collection so far, considering the impact of the Great Resignation on Italian hospitality workers in London. Particularly, the authors explore how COVID-19 and Brexit have increased resignations and affected the well-being and mental health of remaining workers adopting Community-Based Participatory Research and Sensory Ethnography approaches. Through the perspectives of Italian migrants who arrived in London post-2008 economic crisis, Guzzo and Pepe analyse changes in power and language dynamics, how these changes influence migrant identities, and the significance of their linguistic repertoires.

The dissatisfaction of young people entering contemporary society is at the core of another phenomenon known as 'hikikomori', a form of severe social withdrawal, which has been commonly described in Japan and is characterised by adolescents and young adults who become recluses in their bedrooms for long periods of time, refusing any interaction with the outside world. **Sara Corizzato** and **Silvia Cavalieri** employ a mixed method approach, drawing on Corpus-Based Discourse Analysis, to analyse a r/hikikomori Reddit community with the aim of better understanding how emotions and experiences related to this phenomenon are linguistically constructed among members. Specifically, the authors place their attention on how former *hikis* describe their current jobs and explore how social inclusion and personal fulfillment are promoted through (re-)integration into the workforce.

By taking distinct methodological approaches, the contributors have explored the evolving discourses surrounding work and professional identities in response to multiple crises and shifting societal expectations. Through these diverse lenses, they have examined how media representations, professional roles and identities are being reshaped under the influence of external pressures such as economic disruptions, pandemics, and social

trends. The insights generated by this collection may offer valuable contributions to multiple academic disciplines. Researchers in fields such as linguistics, anthropology, sociology, occupational health and well-being will find this collection especially relevant, as it highlights the intersections between language and societal change, and the lived experiences of workers in a rapidly transforming global landscape. As worded by Fairclough, discourses not only describe the world as it is but also envision and represent alternative possibilities beyond the current reality (2003, 17). This proposed exploration may potentially broaden our understanding of the subject and could contribute to discussions on future workplace dynamics, professional identity formation, and the role of language in navigating these changes.

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CHAPTER ONE

DISCOURSES OF INDIVIDUALS FROM THE GREAT RESIGNATION. A RESEARCH PROJECT

KIM GREGO

1.0 Background

‘Great Resignation’ is one of the labels (Klotz, reported by Cohen, 2021) attributed to an economic, social and cultural phenomenon, consisting in unusually high numbers of people voluntarily leaving their jobs. While not at all uncommon in workplaces, this is a trend that has been steadily growing in the United States for the past ten years (McAlpine, reported by Morgan, 2022), seemingly peaking in 2021. It can therefore be considered not a sporadic phenomenon but a consistent tendency of the 21st century thus far. In June 2021, for instance, the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2021) reported a monthly figure of 4 million quits: “[r]epresenting 2.8% of the overall workforce, this was the highest amount of voluntary turnover ever recorded since tracking began in 2000” (Klotz, 2022). Novelities about this trend include the fact that, although lower income workers were more likely (24%) to leave their employment in 2021, 18% of middle-income and 11% of upper-income workers also quit (Pew Research Center, in Parker and Horowitz, 2022): it means that a portion of resignees gave up long-term, stable jobs, even in prestigious fields (e.g. healthcare and tertiary education) and that, among their motivations, there were not only economic considerations but also the search for a better work-life balance and quality of life. Similarly, there exists an analogous trend, that of ‘quiet quitting’, which involves keeping one’s job, but no longer having career ambitions or the desire to go beyond one’s basic tasks; as such, quiet quitting can be seen as a precursor, an alternative to or ‘the next phase’ of resigning (CNBC 2022). The Great Resignation does not exist in the US alone, but it is now a global phenomenon (Klotz, 2022), with all professional sectors in Europe having increasing difficulty recruiting (Chauv  t, 2022).

To explain the reason why employees quit, links are also being made between reported increases in workplace stress and employees' burnout (Jiskrova, 2022). *The Society of Burnout* is the title of the influential book by Korean-born, German philosopher Han (2015), which set the tone, along with other publications, for the Great Resignation trend, as it claimed that our current skills in multitasking are not a development but a regression. We are not lacking the *vita activa*, but instead it is the *vita contemplativa* that is lost to us. Besides this and the COVID-19 pandemic, another hypothesis that is being put forward to explain the phenomenon points to the managers' responsibility for failing to reconcile corporate goals with their employees' individual and collective wellbeing (Zeric, 2022). Indeed, sustainability and wellbeing in the workplace have recently started to be explored in the business disciplinary sector (cf. e.g. Ochoa *et al.*, 2020) but also in education (Pennarola *et al.*, 2021). As key goals envisaged in the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, especially in its objective #3, meant "to [...] promote wellbeing for all at all ages"¹, they can be considered an emerging strategic topic in contemporary research.

1.1 State-of-the-art

Expectedly, the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which evolves at the pace of lexicographic resources, does not record the phrase 'great resignation' yet, but *Encyclopædia Britannica* does feature an entry (Williamson, 2021), and so does *Wikipedia*². This is reflected in the significant number of popular sources (newspapers, magazines, blogs, websites, etc.) dealing with the topic, as opposed to an outstanding scarcity of studies of an academic nature in general and, particularly, in applied linguistics. Linguistic studies indeed have analysed workplace dynamics in terms of politeness, conflict, power, consensus-building (Koester, 2006), covering methodological and theoretical approaches to explore some key areas of workplace talk (Vine, 2017), but resignation discourse is still significantly under-investigated. Extant studies focus on genre analyses of teachers' resignation letters (Dunn *et al.*, 2017a, 2017b; Dunn, 2018) and on gender and communication (Buzzanell and Lucas, 2006).

In sum, the Great Resignation phenomenon seems to have been widely debated in the popular press and on social media, but much less extensively

¹ United Nations 2023, Sustainable Development Goals, Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/health/>.

² Wikipedia, s.v. *GREAT RESIGNATION*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Resignation.

studied academically, with the majority of scholarly works on the subject written from the economic viewpoint. Linguistic studies about it have, to the best of current knowledge, not appeared; similarly, bibliographic searches of the main sociological databases do not return occurrences related to the search term ‘Great Resignation’, either. The limits of such studies are caused by the recent and ongoing nature of the phenomenon, which makes them observations-in-progress that need continuous integrations, and that the approach has comprehensibly focused mostly on the economic and financial aspects.

1.2 Objectives

The intention of this research project, which was named ‘Discourses of Individuals from the Great Resignation’ (DIGRESS), was to attempt to at least partially fill said gap in the literature, by providing a study of the way the Great Resignation phenomenon is linguistically narrated and discursively constructed by the social actors involved. To do so, a multidisciplinary approach was initially envisaged, involving sociological, statistical, anthropological and psychological methods, under the main umbrella of an applied linguistic and discursive perspective. In detail, the theoretical approaches that the linguists in the group have considered rely especially on corpus-driven linguistics, text and genre analysis, narrative studies, domain-specific languages, translation studies, framing, argumentation theory, all conducted from an underlying (critical) discursive approach; they also necessarily concentrate, at least at first, on the North American context.

The DIGRESS project, far from overlooking the economic relevance of the Great Resignation, has intended to tackle it from another perspective, that of the narratives of the primary social actors involved in it. Firstly, this allows the human aspect to emerge. Secondly, investigating first-hand narrations, necessarily told in the past, entails moving away from an economic viewpoint in which the analysis of the past is mostly aimed at making predictions about the future. In this way, although the predictive aspect may be lost (though not entirely), it is thought that it might be possible to frame the discourse of resignation at least within the temporal and spatial contexts in which these narrations were made, allowing for more contextually stable, if temporary, observations.

The objective stemmed from both the person-in-the-street’s curiosity about the life-changing choices made by great resignees, and from the linguistics scholar’s interest in ‘how they talk about it’. However, knowing the complexity of the theme, it was also clear to the linguists in the research group that an inter- and multidisciplinary effort was not only necessary but

also desirable, for an in-depth analysis. The intended aim was thus to collect a quantitatively and qualitatively significant corpus of first-hand narratives by participants in the Great Resignation, in the form of interviews, resignation letters, social media statements and texts belonging to other relevant genres, and to analyse the discourse(s) emerging from them from diverse and interconnected disciplinary approaches, in order to contribute to a better understanding of its current and possibly future social—not just economic—impact. Given the relevance of the phenomenon in the USA, as well as the English linguistics background of the majority of the research group, the project would focus on the USA and possibly, at a later stage, on Italy, where the research project is based, to see whether relevant and useful comparisons could be formulated.

1.3 Research questions

The research questions that were ideally meant to be pursued can be formulated as follows.

A) Can a ‘scientific’ definition of ‘Great Resignation’ be proposed, in addition to the popular understanding of the phenomenon? In detail, is it possible to provide a systematic description of the process, in terms of its structures, actors (single and collective), motivations, outcomes, uses of the label, and terminology to talk about the phenomenon?

B) How do the protagonists of the ‘Great Resignation’ tell their resignation stories?

B1) What causes the Great Resignation, and can qualitative reasons emerge from quantitative studies of the narrations collected? Are there any quantitative or qualitative differences based on the professional field people were/are in, e.g. are some fields more affected than others, did more temporary or permanent workers resign? How does the process leading to this choice change from individual to individual, in terms of motivations, expectations, and ‘initial capitals’ (cultural, economic, social and symbolic)? What do the ways in which the choices of resigning or quietly quitting are narrated tell us about the experiences of their protagonists? Can shifts in social power (im)balance, related to such narrations be evidenced at a macro level? What values and principles—old, new, renewed, hybrid—emerge as societal drives in these stories?

B2) How are the stories constructed discursively? What reasons, personal or environmental, are given for this choice? Is there a difference based on the genre, e.g. if the same story appears in a resignation letter, or an HR manager report, or in a subsequent account? And why? May age, gender and other demographic factors have an impact on discursive constructions? Do resignees frame their narrations ideologically, conceptually, or in any other cognitive sense? What arguments, if any, do they employ to explain

and justify their resignation?

C) What are the differences between the US and Italy? As emerges from questions A) and B), the wider objectives of the project are declined into narrower sub-aims. Likewise, some of the latter are formulated according to the English-speaking applied linguistics tradition and focus on terminology, discursive constructions, frames and arguments; while others are specific to the non-linguistic disciplines involved in this multidisciplinary research team. American historians could, for instance, investigate the historical circumstances—especially in terms of crises—that made the first 2010s a fertile period to accommodate the job-leaving trend that would peak in 2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic, and be labelled ‘Great Resignation’. Sociologists could concentrate on the uses of the label ‘Great Resignation’, and the individual and collective social actors involved, reflecting on their backgrounds, motivations and expectations, with particular attention to the Italian context. Anthropologists may explore resignees against social space, threat and structural change. Statisticians could address the same questions, but attempting to derive their answers from the quantitative study of the texts collected for the research.

The project, so far, has only started to tackle some of these questions, as will be reported in the next few sections.

1.4 Research group

For the purposes laid out in the previous section, the DIGRESS research group was set up *ad hoc*, bringing together scholars from four different Italian universities, large and small, based both in the North and in the South of Italy. While there is a clear majority of linguists, the group also included non-linguists specialising in different fields, all deemed relevant for the study of the phenomenon, in order to create a multidisciplinary environment at both the local and national level. The research group was thus composed:

- I. University of Milan: Kim Grego, Marco M. Sioli (American history and institutions), Mario De Benedittis (sociology of culture and communication), Laura Di Ferrante, Francesca Cappellini
- II. University of Insubria: Alessandra Vicentini, Daniel Russo, Sebastiano Citroni (sociology of culture and communication), Gilberto Giannacchi
- III. University of Palermo: Marianna L. Zummo, Tatiana Canziani, Giovanni Boscaïno (social statistics), Stefano Montes (demology, ethnology and anthropology)
- IV. University of Eastern Piedmont: Laura Tommaso, Elisabetta Lonati, Samuele Poy (economic policy)

Unless differently specified in brackets, the team members all belong to the English linguistics and translation sector.

1.5 Methodology

The variety of theoretical tools that is made reference to here is wide and differentiated, because the phenomenon in question is a multi-faceted expression of the current times, which cannot and will not be explained or even just described from a single methodological perspective. Thus, just like applied linguistics is not deemed sufficient to undertake this task, a single approach within applied linguistics would also be limiting. On the contrary, the range of tools at a linguist's disposal enables us to, for example, address the stories coming from the Great Resignation as narratives (storytelling, Toolan, 1988/2001), investigate the specifics linked to professional domains (specialised languages, Garzone, 2020; sociolinguistics, Friginal, 2018), categorise them according to their genre (e.g. resignation letters, diary entries, blog posts, etc.), identify how they are framed ideologically (framing, Goffman 1984), highlight the arguments and argumentative strategies (argumentation, van Eemeren and Henkemans, 2017) employed in explaining and justifying a choice—that of leaving work—which goes against the mainstream notion of being employed as a form of economic and social security. Overall considerations about the shifting of power between and among social actors can then be provided by critically analysing (critical discourse studies, Flowerdew and Richardson, 2018) the various discourses—unfolding through business, family, social settings—that intersect and contribute to creating the macro discourse of the great resignation. Finally, the entire process could be assessed against (translation studies, Jonsson *et al.*, 2019) another language (Italian, in this case), to offer a compared view that would enable to contrast the US experience and a European (the Italian) one.

Suggested methodological contributions from the non-linguists in the group include

- sociological theoretical influences such as Goffman's (1986) frame analysis, Berelson's (1952) content analysis, and Boltanski/Chiappello's (1999) on the new spirit of capitalism;
- anthropological studies on threat and structural change;
- perspectives on the contemporary history of the US (Sextor, 2018);
- statistical models of Natural Language Processing (NLP), a set of techniques that allows computers to understand, analyse, and process human language; in particular, topic modelling, text mining and text embedding (Taherdoost, 2016).

1.6 Rationale

The DIGRESS project was conceived to be in line with the strategic objectives Italy's National Recovery and Resilience Plan³ within Europe's Recovery and Resilience Facility⁴ instrument, and to fit a specific 1) strategic emerging topic, 2) cluster and 3) subcluster of the Horizon Europe Research and innovation funding programme⁵.

Relevance

The project is considered relevant and partly innovative for the English linguistics sector for the social relevance the scientific models, conferences and publications that it is expected to produce will have, and the potential ability to establish partnerships with interested companies and institutions. This would underline the role that the Humanities can play in economically productive settings and, possibly, contribute to implementing wellbeing in organisations.

Coherence

Specifically, the project is inserted within the European strategic emerging topic of 'Human wellbeing', since it aims to understand what drives a voluntary change in labour conditions in a time of crisis. It fits the cluster focusing on 'Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society', because it explores the creative ways humans have of acting in resilient manners, it embraces the notion of culture as the indispensable background to understand the human mind, and it ponders on the novel ways that great resignees have of exiting established working environments, while at the same time setting up other social circles that may be better inclusive of and for them. Finally, the entire project is deeply involved in "what drives the type of change inherent in the act of resigning, the demographics and mobility behind it, with the aim of better understanding economic and social

³ European Commission, Italy's recovery and resilience plan, https://commission.europa.eu/business-economy-euro/economicrecovery/recovery-and-resilience-facility/country-pages/italys-recovery-and-resilience-plan_en.

⁴ European Commission, The Recovery and Resilience Facility, https://commission.europa.eu/business-economy-euro/economic-recovery/recovery-and-resilience-facility_en.

⁵European Commission, Horizon, https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe_en.

change, and to promote human wellbeing and social sustainability” – all this moving from language and the use humans make of it.

Impact

The innovative contribution and societal impact envisaged by the DIGRESS project is at least threefold, based as specified on one Horizon topic, one cluster and one subcluster, with as many foreseen actions on the part of the research group.

1) Strategic emerging topic: ‘Human wellbeing’ → Action: ‘Define’. The general strategic emerging topic this project wishes to contribute to, ‘Human wellbeing’, is both a condition and an aim in itself. The assumption made is that giving up one’s job in the midst of a pandemic, with its social and economic repercussions, is done only if there is hope for better conditions (of any type, from economic to psychological), i.e. if one does not feel well in one’s current employed condition. Such “better conditions”, whatever their nature, are identified as an attempt to reach wellbeing. ‘Wellbeing’ thus emerges as a complex human notion that requires a complex and multidisciplinary research approach, and cannot be ignored linguistically, when language is the intrinsic communicative tool of humans. It is hoped that the project may contribute to doing precisely this: empowering people by facilitating their understanding of change.

2) Cluster: ‘Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society’ → Action: ‘Describe’. The cluster in which the project is inscribed contains fundamental key terms. Resigning from a job, as is the current understanding, is no mainstream choice. As such, a person who chooses to do so may easily be seen as giving up, together with their job, their professional and social inclusion: it could be seen as an excluding choice. While for some resignees burnout may be the reason for their self-exclusion and marginalisation, we suggest that, for others, it could be seen as an exclusive, rather than an excluding, choice. A different understanding of personal and professional values may result in a semantic turn from negative to positive connotations, a creative and not a destructive move. Describing the Great Resignation by using the methodological tools of applied linguistics, combined with insights from economics, sociology, anthropology and history, can return a realistic and comprehensive picture of the phenomenon.

3) Subcluster: ‘The understanding of the social, ethical, political and economic impacts of drivers of change strengthens social and economic sustainability’ → Action: ‘Understand’. The subcluster chosen for the DIGRESS project, finally, focuses and refines our research objectives. In the Social Sciences and Humanities (SH), the main domain represented in

the project's team, research often seems to remain detached from the burning social issues that our society faces. It is felt that this distance need not be there and that, while SH scholars may not provide the hands-on solutions that technology stemming from the hard sciences does, we too can make a perceivable difference in society. As citizens, scholars suffer from the very same issues that society is affected by. SH scholars thus have the tools to make sense of them, and attempt to understand change when we see it and when we live it. While it is not the scholar's place to suggest policies, it is their duty to provide scientific reports to those who must make policies. By scientifically gathering first-hand data from the social actors involved, and providing informed interpretations of the data that we gather, it is believed that scholars may make observations that may come in useful to the policy maker, in revisiting the traditional workplace dynamics, promoting a positive mental culture in workplaces and employing communicative tools to predict worker (in)satisfaction and possible burnout "before" resignation. Resigning from one's job in a time of crisis is a phenomenon that needs understanding, explaining and framing into the changing social cauldron we live in. Only by analysing this present trend, can researchers hope to perhaps get a hint of what its future direction may be or, at least, to make informed predictions – certainly not of an economic but of a social kind.

1.7 Projected outcomes

Considering the connection that the DIGRESS project is envisaged to maintain with the Horizon Europe framework outlined above, the research is expected to have a number of outcomes with an impact at both the academic and the social levels. Because the specific sub-cluster it is ideally inscribed into (see 3) in previous section) investigates how sustainability is reinforced by understanding change, the project's contribution would insist on the 'understanding' aspect. Only by expressing one's intentions, reporting one's actions and, ultimately, telling one's stories is it possible to share the meaning of one's decisions within a community and society at large. While an economic phenomenon may well be analysed based on figures and trends, the social value thereof can hardly emerge in full without listening to the primary actors involved in the interplay. A thorough analysis of the existing discourses involved in the Great Resignation and of those emerging as novel is therefore to be considered the main output from the proposed research. For the same reason (understanding the shift in values driving great resignees), while written statements such as social media narratives and resignation letters may also be collected, in-person and onsite interviews are deemed the most precious and sought-after type of datum to

obtain, which would represent a more ‘human’ approach to the subject of job quitting, using face-to-face interviews and not just closed-question surveys.

Expected outputs

Stemming from the outline of the project as illustrated in the previous sections, among the theoretical and practical outputs expected there is, firstly, the desire to understand the values upheld or rejected when voluntarily resigning from a job that is socially perceived as ‘good’. Secondly, there is the will to provide an academic and social understanding of the phenomenon, and to contribute further to investigations and interdisciplinary research on the subject. To this end, another expected result is the proposal of theoretical models for discursively interpreting social phenomena, starting from the analysis of self-constructed identities. This being a rapidly evolving world, posing complex societal challenges, it is deemed both academically relevant and socially useful to develop flexible interpretative tools that may be adapted as required by the context, setting and circumstances. In this sense, the bottom-up drive of satisfying the layperson’s curiosity about what may be largely perceived as a counter-current, anti- or new-capitalist trend and, ultimately, as a self-harming act may successfully be combined with the production of rigorous scholarly work with (hopefully positive) repercussions. Finally, the project, when fully developed, could yield applied products such as a) a corpus of interviews which, if collected with professional accuracy, in an ethical manner and duly anonymised to meet privacy criteria, may be considered a relevant output in itself and may afterward be utilised for further investigations, including by scholars across disciplines, and b) a web platform hosting the collected material and a conclusive in-depth analysis of existing and emerging discourses, also meant as a connecting tool for the social actors involved.

1.8 Results and future developments

One year into the project, which started in the autumn of 2022 and has been completely self-financed, the DIGRESS research group has so far begun an initial exploration of a number of linguistic aspects related to the Great Resignation. The research subject, to date, has been addressed from the principal standpoint—that of English applied linguistics, especially considering literature on narratives and storytelling (Toolan, 1988/2001), identity construction (Schwartz *et al.*, 2011), and inter-discursive genre

analysis (Bhatia 2004, 2017), making use of tools from corpus linguistics (Kilgariff *et al.*, 2014, Egbert and Baker, 2020, Vásquez, 2022) and sentiment analysis (LIWC). The result of this exploration took the form of papers delivered at international conferences, all addressing specific issues, and currently in the process of being published or submitted for publication.

Giannacchi and Russo (2023) presented the paper ‘Quiet quitting as a social sustainability model: a corpus-based discourse analysis of UK and US newspaper and magazine articles on quiet quitting’ at the ECHIC2023 ‘Ecological Mindedness and Sustainable Wellbeing’ conference held at the University of Ferrara, Italy, on 25-27 May 2023. This is based on a specially constructed corpus of 94 US and UK online media articles on the phenomenon—different from but connected to the Great Resignation—of ‘quiet quitting’, in which employees keep their jobs but work at a minimum and no longer cultivate career ambitions. The analysis concludes that terms such as ‘life’ and ‘balance’ collocate with ‘work’, especially when evaluatively premodified within the phrase ‘better work-life balance’, thus pointing to this concept as a desired value of quiet quitters. In addition, quiet quitting may also be perceived as a socially sustainable practice, wherein sustainability is understood as a qualitative improvement.

Zummo, Tommaso, Grego and Vicentini (2023) started to tackle the actual notion of Great Resignation from its basic definitions in a study titled ‘The Great Resignation: Exploring Definitions and Discourses’, presented at DNC5-ALED ‘Discourses and their Impacts on a World of Multiple Crises’, held at the University of Valencia, Spain, on 25-28 July 2023. Investigating videos made between 2020 and 2022 by US YouTubers aged 20-30 who report on their own experience as great resignees, it was found that these people predominantly express positive emotions of empowerment and motivation and, far from experiencing negative feelings, position themselves as innovators and trend-setters who introduce a novel approach to personal and professional (mostly digital) life.

Tommaso and Di Ferrante (2023) brought the project further, by ‘Exploring the Representation of the Great Resignation in the UK and US Press: A Corpus-Assisted Discourse Study’, a research step that was presented at AIA31 ‘Future Horizons: New Beginnings in English Studies’, held at the University of Calabria, Rende, Italy, on 13-16 September 2023. Findings reveal that Great Resignation narratives are provided along with causes, consequences, and possible solutions. Moreover, by examining publications from both sides of the Atlantic, a first comparative perspective is offered, pointing to possible cultural and social variations in the representation of the phenomenon.

Grego’s (2023) report on the ‘Discourses of Individuals from the Great

Resignation. Introducing the research project’, also illustrated at AIA31 ‘Future Horizons: New Beginnings in English Studies’, held at the University of Calabria, Rende, Italy, on 13-16 September 2023, summarised the rationale behind the DIGRESS research project, the interdisciplinary methodology devised for the scope—particularly the linguistic approaches selected for the purposes of definition—and the developments occurred as of the time of the conference. An edited publication was further announced for 2024, on the wider theme of occupational wellbeing in contemporary times.

The first tangible product of the research, finally, is represented by this very volume, *Exploring New Occupational Discourses and Identities across Genres: Crisis and Well-Being*. Announced, as mentioned, in September 2023, it brings together most of the results of the research obtained so far, includes other voices concerned with the notion of wellbeing in times of crisis, and represents a first answer to the lack of linguistic literature on the Great Resignation, hopefully paving the way for further investigations on the subject from the same or other perspectives.

Possible developments of the project are as many as laid out in the ‘Projected outcomes’ section—and many more, if we are to include other potential contributions on the theme by other scholars within and without applied linguistics. Corpus building—the mentioned interviews with great resignees—probably remains the most ambitious as well as desirable outcome to pursue next, for the human, social and scientific richness it would represent. The DIGRESS group sees this project as work-in-progress, understanding that, while the Great Resignation may be just one instance thereof, that of ‘wellbeing in times of crisis’ is a wider and ongoing discourse that needs a wider and ongoing research effort.

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