# i-mean@UWE2011

## Răzvan SĂFTOIU

Petroleum-Gas University of Ploieşti, 39 Bd. Bucureşti, Ploieşti
E-mail: razvansaftoiu@gmail.com

Between 13 and 15 April 2011, the University of the West of England, Bristol was the venue of the Second International Conference on Meaning in Interaction, also known as i-mean. The slogan of the university, U+WE, is a good starting point for the presentation of this conference, a place where scholars from almost 20 countries met and discussed about meaning and context. Everybody at UWE – professors, students, technicians, administrators – tried and succeeded in making this conference a stimulating event for all the participants both from the academic and the social point of view.

The conference mainly addressed the relationship between context and meaning, how context may be defined, how meaning is interpreted in context, how speakers create and negotiate context in interaction, and how context is dealt with in different research traditions. Yet, if we follow the programme attentively, we will notice that this was an event where cutting edge interdisciplinary research was disseminated.

(see www1.uwe.ac.uk/cahe/elc/newsandevents/events/i-meanuwe2.aspx)

The plenary speakers of the conference were well-known specialists in the field of conversation analysis, pragmatics and discourse analysis: Karin Aijmer from University of Gothenburg (Sweden), Paul Drew from University of York (United Kingdom), Susan C. Herring from Indiana University (USA), Sally McConnell-Ginet from Cornell University (USA) and Norma Mendoza-Denton from the University of Arizona (USA). During the plenaries, the speakers addressed various topics which were not only conext and meaning-based but also presented updated methodological aspects and easy-to-follow arguments. All in all, the plenaries focused on how we use language to 'do things', i.e. how people construct and negotiate multiple identities, manage interactions, (dis)agree with interlocutors, etc.

The conference was organized around two main panels – *Multilingualism at Work* and *Researching Sociopragmatic Variability: Implications for the classroom* – one round table, *Stances, methodologies and methods for the analysis of context in interaction*, and regular papers focusing on one of the following themes:

- o Context in spoken interaction: methodologies and methods,
- o Context and meaning in translation,
- o Context and intercultural pragmatics,
- o Multimodal approaches to context,
- o The teachability of sociopragmatics.

The aim of the panel entiltled *Multilingualism at Work* was to address a complex phenomenon – workplace communication – from various perspectives: the language policy of the workplace, the actual cultural practices of professional groups, reading and writing in

multilingual settings. In the current global market, multinational enterprises and institutions find it more and more difficult to operate on the basis of one language only. The panel showed that multilingual realities are becoming increasingly complex and a number of perspectives are relevant to the understanding of the different angles of multilingualism at work.

The papers that were presented in the panel *Researching Sociopragmatic Variability: Implications for the classroom* explored the theoretical and methodological issues arising from research studies of sociopragmatic variability and the communication of meaning in interaction. The panel included presentations of empirical studies which have investigated sociopragmatic variability in a range of research contexts, for example pragmatic development in graduate students in relation to internal and external modification of requests. The panel generated issues of relevance to both pedagogy and research.

The notion of *stancetaking*, or simply *stance*, was the key "ingredient" of the round table. This concept has been widely used as a way of explaining linguistic behaviour in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology for more than 10 years. The presentations were challenging since they focused on defining stance either as evaluation, alignment or positioning, but mostly on discovering the ways in which the contextualized meaning is achieved through interaction.

All things considered, I hope U now have a sense of what WE heard and talked about at the second i-mean conference in Bristol.