Special Issue "Fachsprache"

Specialised Communication in Social Work: Perspectives and Challenges

In various fields of social work, professionals write elaborate documents and engage in complex communicative situations. This involves, amongst others, communicating the need for change of real-life circumstances of individuals or vulnerable groups as well as in social spaces. The importance of communication when forming and mediating relations between institutions, social service users, and educators is obvious. Research on language for specific purposes (LSP) focuses on the study of language use tailored to specific professional, academic, or occupational contexts. However, both theoretical and empirical social work research as well as linguistic specialised communication research, have not sufficiently addressed this professional communication in a systematic and coordinated manner. Against this backdrop, we as guest editors for a special issue of the leading journal on professional and scientific communication are pleased to invite contributions on this important topic.

We welcome contributions that address and systematise the fragmented and linguistically under-researched developments in this area, as well as papers that introduce new challenges and perspectives to the discourse. We seek to provide a deeper understanding of the development of language and communication in social work – beyond counselling research – in particular through the consideration of oral and written peer-to-peer communication, written interprofessional communication, participatory and inclusive specialised language development and professional documentation. By examining historical developments, interprofessional collaboration, diversity, digital transformation and educational approaches, the special issue aims to advance the research and professional communication discourse in social work.

For this issue, we call for empirically oriented contributions that address and explore one or more of the aspects described below.

- **Conflict-oriented Perspectives:** Social work is historically linked to conflictual negotiation processes on social issues. As such, the conflictual, social perspective has always been at the essence of social work. Contributions can develop perspectives on how this conflict orientation shapes the development of specialised communication in social work and what specific challenges arise for the profession.

- **Social Diversity and the Development of Specialised Communication**: Social heterogeneity is reflected in language; scholarly discourse in social work conveys inclusion and sensitivity towards discrimination as central ethical paradigms. Contributions can examine to what extent these central paradigms are represented in the language of social work.

- **Opportunities and Challenges of Digitalisation**: Digitalisation is shaping the development of social services in which social work is significantly involved. The development of professional communication in social work is also shaped by this process. This offers both opportunities and challenges for the professionalisation of social work, which can be explored in contributions.

- **Curricular Perspectives and Professional Profile**: Another topic concerns teaching and further development of the language for specific purposes (LSP) in the academic studies of social work as well as in the transfer into professional practice. What kind of communication skills do social work professionals currently have? Which skills would be necessary? For example, one might consider the possibilities of modular development of LSP teaching during the study of social work as well as the opportunities and challenges that would arise from that.

- **Comprehensibility and Participation**: Comprehensibility is a particular challenge in the professional communication within social work. Since one of the main tasks of social work is to enable participation and support people in an emancipatory way, linguistic comprehensibility plays a crucial role when it comes to the users of social work. One way of exploring this is to use the service perspective approach and perspectives of service user involvement.

- **LSP Development and Power**: Talking and writing about people's life situations is at risk to produce powerful positions of professionals and reproduce marginalisation. Use of LSP might foster these processes and is thus worth to take a closer look at empirically. On the other hand, the hegemony of different professions with established LSP, like medicine, is not only visible in the specialised language, but also influences the development of the LSP in some fields of social work. The question of how recurring terminological negotiations influence the professional embedding of social work is one that requires empirical investigation.

- **Knowledge Making and Knowledge Communication through and with LSP**: Does explicit verbalisation of professional interpretation and action routines reveal processes of knowledge making in and on the work with service users?

- **Evolution of Specialised Terminology**: Professions can be characterised by a specific terminology. The evolution of such terminology has hardly been studied for social work in terms of its development and change. Contributions can examine the historical influences, social change processes in the development of the profession as well as technological developments that have contributed to a potential fragmentation of the LSP of social work.

- **Description of the Language System**: How can the LSP of social work be studied, accounted for, and further developed with regard to its lexicon/terminology, syntax and the text level? The contributions can also regard influences of and cross-references to the LSP of other disciplines.

All contributions must be clearly related to social work. Papers that merely address social work in part, but which are primarily rooted in other professional specialised language traditions will not be accepted. An example of this would be psychotherapeutic reporting in child and youth welfare or purely legal communication in court-appointed legal support, neither of which is the focus of this special issue. Both quantitative and qualitative perspectives on the topic are welcome, as long as the focus on empirical research is maintained. The publication languages are German and English.

Submission is a two-stage process. In the first stage, we call for **abstracts with a length of approx. 500 words**. Please send your abstracts to Fachsprache2026@th-koeln.de **by 30 January 2025**. After this

deadline, the guest editors and the Editorial Board of "Fachsprache" will review the abstracts and invite the selected contributors to submit a full paper. Feedback on abstracts will be sent out mid-April. Full papers are due by 31 December 2025. In the second stage, the full papers undergo a standard double-blind peer-review process. Based on the reviews, approx. five full papers will be published in "Fachsprache", issue 3/4 2026.

Prof. Dr. Nina Erdmann

TH Köln, Faculty of Applied Social Sciences, Institute for Research in Social Work (IRIS)

Prof. Dr. Karolina Suchowolec

TH Köln, Faculty of Information Science and Communication Studies, Institute of Translation and Multilingual Communication

Dr. Sascha Wolfer

Leibniz Institute for the German Language, Mannheim