**April 18   Marco Jacquemet, Communication Studies, USF**

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**WHAT’S IN A NAME? REFERENTIAL ACCURACY AND CREDIBILITY INASYLUM HEARINGS**

Using ethnographic evidence from asylum hearings in various European countries (Italy, Belgium, the United Kingdom, and Albania), this paper explores the problematic role played by proper names during these proceedings. In these hearings, asylum seekers are asked to provide proper names (personal and place names), which bureaucrats then probe for the purpose of adjudication. In this context, applicants are responsible for the referential accuracy of their statements (especially in regards to proper names), whereas examiners and adjudicators use their authority to ensure that applicants’ claims make referential sense. Applicants need to make sure that their references are properly produced and interpreted, or face the charge of referential inaccuracy (i.e. “lying”).

The claim of this paper is that common-sensical assumptions about the denotational power of proper names can have serious negative effects on asylum adjudication. My data show that the officers’ search for, and the applicants’ production of, the proper reference is rendered problematic by the intercultural breakdowns resulting from unmatched semiotics of the referential world. This paper argues that institutions seeking to determine who and what to believe are better served by taking a holistic look at applicants’ narratives: instead of focusing solely on referential accuracy, they should also take into consideration the story itself, its performance, and interactional effectiveness.