

SEM26. Beyond human exceptionalism: Social and ecojustice perspectives in climate crisis discourse

26A 12 September h. 16:30-19:00, Auditorium

26B 13 September h. 8:30-11:00, Auditorium

Convenors

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Abstract

The climate crisis is not solely an environmental issue but also a profound social, cultural, and political challenge, exacerbating vulnerabilities related to gender, disability, poverty, age, place of birth, and indigeneity (IPCC 2023). Moreover, dominant discourse frequently marginalizes, silences, or renders invisible more-than-human participants, processes, and entities (Stibbe, 2021; Bortoluzzi & Zurru, 2024). Given that language and discourse play a constitutive role in shaping ecological realities (Steffensen, 2024), language and discourse analysis can contribute to raising awareness of ecojustice issues, fostering equitable relationships within life-sustaining ecosystems, and challenging the hegemonic ideologies of growth and consumerism (Lakoff, 2010; Fløttum, 2017; Russo, 2018; Caimotto, 2020).

Following this line of thought, this seminar invites scholarly contributions that propose innovative theoretical frameworks, methodological approaches, or in-depth investigations examining environmental and climate crisis discourse from an eco- and social justice perspective. In particular, we seek analyses that explore the representation, positioning, and agency of marginalized voices – both human and more-than-human – that are frequently backgrounded or excluded from mainstream environmental narratives. Ultimately, this seminar aspires to advance the scholarly debate on how language and discourse can foster alternative perspectives, stimulate transformative action, and promote social and ecological justice in response to the ongoing climate emergency.

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SEM26. Papers

26A 12 September h. 16:30-19:00, Auditorium

- *An investigation of the online communicative practices of grassroots environmental activism in India: the case of #SaveHasdeoForest* (Elisabetta Zurru, Università di Genova)
- *Searching for eco-fascist discourse online: a corpus-assisted ecolinguistic approach to the politicization of climate change* (Mariasophia Falcone, Università degli Studi di Bergamo)
- *Between protection and exploitation: Biodiversity, more-than-human agency and passivisation in climate-related corporate discourse* (Arianna Del Gaudio, Università di Napoli L'Orientale)
- *An exploration of discourse around ecocentrism in academic books* (Virginia Zorzi, Università di Torino)
- *Towards an ecojustice pedagogy for EFL young learners: Reimagining language education beyond human exceptionalism* (Valentina Adami, Università degli Studi di Bergamo)

26B 13 September h. 8:30-11:00, Auditorium

- *The language of threat or the gentle nudge?* (Denise Milizia, Università degli Studi di Bari Aldo Moro)
- *Climate change and Gen Z's digital activism: A TikTok case study* (Simone Causa, Università di Napoli L'Orientale)
- *Becoming parents at the end of the world: Motherhood, trauma and the climate crisis* (Aureliana Natale, Università di Napoli Federico II)
- *Silenced by design: Marginal voices and algorithmic bias in AI-generated climate discourse* (Marina Brancaccio, Università degli Studi Internazionali di Roma)
- *Appraisal and framing in the climate crisis discourse: Comment trend analyses on TikTok and YouTube* (Vincenzo Amendolara, Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna)

SEM26. Abstracts

Towards an ecojustice pedagogy for EFL young learners: reimagining language education beyond human exceptionalism

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The environmental and social challenges of the 21st century require teachers and teacher educators to rethink the dominant educational paradigms through which knowledge is constructed and transmitted, seeking new perspectives that amplify marginalized voices, both human and non-human (Damico, Baildon & Panos, 2020). To equip young learners with the values and skills needed to contribute to more sustainable and just futures, it is essential to integrate ecological and social justice principles into educational practices that emphasise sustainability, equity and critical thinking (Adami, 2024). Ecojustice pedagogy offers a promising pathway to support the development of children's environmental agency, challenging human exceptionalism and promoting collective responsibility. In the context of EFL education, this entails considering the role of discourse in constructing or resisting dominant narratives and reimagining the EFL classroom as a transformative space for critical engagement with environmental and social issues, rather than for the mere acquisition of linguistic skills (Kazazoglu, 2025). Drawing on recent developments in ecojustice pedagogy, language acquisition theories and ecolinguistics, this paper aims to propose a framework for designing environmentally and socially responsive language learning experiences based on storytelling, outdoor education and nature-based approaches (Prins et al, 2025). The theoretical and pedagogical foundations supporting the integration of ecojustice principles into children's EFL education will serve to illustrate how such principles can inform language teaching practices that not only foster communicative competence but also promote socio-ecological awareness and transformative action.

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Appraisal and framing in the climate crisis discourse: Comment trend analyses on TikTok and YouTube

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The dire consequences of anthropogenic climate disruption are vividly exemplified by natural disasters, endangered species, and melting ice caps. According to a recent UNICEF report, extreme climate events disrupted the schooling of over 242 million students in 85 countries in 2024, further amplifying the already critical global learning crisis, particularly in climate-vulnerable regions (UNICEF, 2025).

In parallel, 2024 was also the year in which ‘brain rot’, a term denoting the intellectual deterioration associated with the overconsumption of trivial content on social media, was announced as Oxford’s *Word of the Year*. Social media and the post-truth realities they are shaping have profoundly impacted the narratives, actions and attitudes of modern society in general, and towards the climate crisis in particular, where the concept of a *multicrisis* may thus be seen as the blatant epitome of the current Zeitgeist. At the same time, social media can play a crucial role in addressing such concerns and in fostering eco-awareness (Natale, 2022).

The proposed case study constitutes, in this respect, an instance of ecolinguistic analysis, in which the concepts of *climate crisis* and *ecojustice* are investigated through an eco-thematic selection of *Shorts* from news media accounts across two social media platforms: *TikTok* and *YouTube*. This study aims to contrastively examine the prevailing econarratives (Stibbe, 2024) across news media on both platforms by analyzing user comment trends and identifying specific appraisal (Martin & White, 2005), framing and reaction patterns in the climate crisis discourse on social media.

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Silenced by design: Marginal voices and algorithmic bias in AI-generated climate discourse

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This research investigates how artificial intelligence, and particularly large language models (LLMs), contributes to shaping climate crisis discourse by reinforcing dominant perspectives while sidelining alternative or marginal voices. As AI-generated content becomes increasingly common in public communication—via chatbots, automated news, and algorithm-assisted media—the question arises: whose voices are being heard, and whose are rendered invisible? Building on the work of Stibbe (2021), Fløttum (2017), and Lakoff (2010), and drawing insights from ecolinguistics and posthumanist thought, this research explores the ideological implications of AI-generated climate discourse. While LLMs are often perceived as neutral, their outputs reflect training data largely grounded in mainstream, Global North, and anthropocentric perspectives (Chen et al., 2022; Galaz et al., 2023; IPCC, 2023). As a result, indigenous knowledge systems, ecofeminist viewpoints, and more-than-human agencies are frequently generalised, tokenised, or omitted entirely.

Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA; Fairclough, 2003) as its core methodology, complemented by framing analysis (Cap, 2017), this study examines AI-generated responses to climate justice-oriented prompts submitted to LLMs such as ChatGPT, Bard, and Bing AI. The analysis focuses on the construction of agency, the use of passive or impersonal voice, and the ideological framing of key terms such as “crisis”, “innovation”, and “resilience”. Attention is also paid to discursive silences and omissions—particularly regarding marginalised social groups and nonhuman entities. Preliminary findings suggest that while AI systems can simulate inclusive discourse when explicitly prompted, they default to technocratic and institutional framings that leave little room for plural, situated, or relational ecologies. By interrogating the language patterns and exclusions embedded in AI-generated texts, this research contributes to the ongoing conversation on ecological justice, discursive power, and the ethical design of generative technologies.

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Climate change and Gen Z's digital activism: A TikTok case study

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Climate change has varying effects on different communities, creating a complex dialogue between places and people who are disproportionately affected (Pavola 2017). The internet has become a crucial space for discussing social issues like climate change, allowing marginalised communities to amplify their voices and reach wider audiences. However, it also fosters echo chambers of like-minded individuals, which can limit exposure to diverse perspectives (KhosraviNik, 2018: 436).

In this evolving digital landscape, Gen Z has emerged as a prominent force in environmental activism, leveraging social media to advocate for climate justice (Holmberg & Alvinus, 2019: 88). This paper explores Gen Z's discourses on climate change by analysing content on TikTok, specifically videos tagged under the hashtag *EcoTok*. Initially launched by a group of young climate activists, *EcoTok* has since developed into a broader digital community where users share sustainable practices, promote eco-conscious products, and engage in everyday forms of environmentalism (Denicolai & Domenici, 2023: 181). The analysis will examine videos that have garnered more than 500 likes over a four-year span since the hashtag's inception, shedding light on the TikTok-native eco-justice movements.

Unlike previous studies that often treat online communities as uniform entities (e.g., Bennett & Segerberg, 2013), this research will focus on the geographical locations of posts to assess the resonance of these climate change messages across different regions. Additionally, it will critically analyse the sustainable practices promoted within this digital community. To achieve this, Social Media Critical Discourse Studies (KhosraviNik, 2023) will be adapted to the TikTok platform.

Methodologically, a bottom-up approach combining linguistic and multimodal pattern analysis will be employed and adapted to the videos of the *ecotok* community. Transcript of the videos will constitute the textual data of the study whereas content analysis and multimodal discourse analysis will be employed to analyse the visual patterns. A Python Script gathering metadata will be used to gather video information, Sketchengine and atlas.ti will be used as tools for the linguistic and visual analysis, respectively. This approach will not only examine climate change discourses within *EcoTok* videos but will also analyse their evolution both diachronically and synchronically. By doing so, this study aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how TikTok fosters inclusive—or exclusive—climate activism within Gen Z communities.

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Between protection and exploitation: Biodiversity, more-than-human agency and passivisation in climate-related corporate discourse

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In recent decades, environmental issues have emerged as a pivotal concern for corporations, leading to a significant increase in corporate communication on climate change, environmental sustainability and biodiversity (Catenaccio 2021). In particular, biodiversity protection has emerged as a central theme within contemporary corporate agendas, as corporations acknowledge the importance of preserving irreplaceable species and safeguarding essential ecosystem services. This commitment not only aims to mitigate the loss of biodiversity but also seeks to enhance ecological resilience, thereby promoting sustainable practices that are crucial for maintaining the integrity of natural systems. According to previous studies, discourse is essential in delineating ecological realities within business contexts and in influencing the interplay between corporations and the environment (Yu, 2020; Steffensen, 2024). However, dominant corporate discourse often perpetuates consumerist and growth-oriented ideologies, treating biodiversity and more-than-human entities as passive resources to be managed for profit rather than integral components in life-sustaining ecological systems, effectively diminishing their agency in the broader ecological narrative (Bortoluzzi & Zurru 2024; Stibbe 2021). Yet, the way in which biodiversity and more-than-human entities are represented in relation to humans has received scarce attention in scholarly research (Bortoluzzi 2024).

Building on such premises, the present study investigates how food and beverage corporations position and represent marginalised more-than-human voices, with regard to biodiversity, in climate-related corporate discourse. The investigation draws on Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies and Ecolinguistics (Partington et al. 2013; Poole 2022; Stibbe 2021) to critically analyse the CRClm corpus, a purpose-compiled corpus of corporate texts addressing environmental issues (7 million words).

The analysis will focus on the strategies employed by corporations to represent more-than-human voices in the context of the climate crisis, shedding light on the role of language in enabling corporate actors to demonstrate care for the environment while erasing the agency of more-than-human natural resources. Therefore, the work aims to examine whether food and beverage corporations perpetuate prevailing environmental narratives through an anthropocentric use of language, which may be disguised as a genuine commitment to environmental stewardship to foster transformative change.

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Searching for eco-fascist discourse online: a corpus-assisted ecolinguistic approach to the politicization of climate change

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Eco-fascism is a far-right ideology that exploits environmental concerns to pursue ethnonationalist and authoritarian objectives. Rooted in nativist beliefs that view racialized others as threats to national and environmental security, eco-fascism results in exclusionary and supremacist responses, blaming immigration and overpopulation for climate change

(Forchtner, 2019; Richards et al., 2022). Recently, it has also served as an ideological basis for acts of terrorism (e.g., the Utøya shooting in 2011, and the 2019 Christchurch and El Paso shootings), and has been echoed in the growing use of the term *illegal aliens* in U.S. right-wing discourse (Hughes et al., 2022; Richards et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2025), suggesting that exclusionary environmental discourses are becoming increasingly relevant as the climate crisis worsens. Notably, online climate discourse fosters knowledge (re)production and rethinking of climate meanings and values (Bevitori & Russo, 2022), thus making digital spaces particularly relevant for the study of how climate issues are communicated. Building on these considerations, this study presents a preliminary investigation into the presence of eco-fascist discourse on Reddit, focusing mainly on climate-related subreddits. In particular, the analysis draws on corpus-assisted ecolinguistics (Poole, 2022), beginning with a quantitative exploration of data and followed by a qualitative analysis into how climate change and its related meanings are presented, possibly reflecting exclusionary or nativist framings, especially regarding how immigration may be linked to ecological threats. Finally, the analysis has two main objectives: first, to investigate whether eco-fascist discourse is present on Reddit and its possible features; second, as the politicization of climate change is likely to increase, with climate-mitigation efforts being embedded in broader ideological conflicts, to examine how discursive strategies may frame authoritarian or exclusionary ideologies as forms of environmental protection, turning environmental action into a vehicle for extremist ideology.

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The language of threat or the gentle nudge?

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This research, part of a larger-scale project, has a twofold purpose: to look at the different policies and approaches used both in Europe and in the U.S. to address the climate crisis, thus analyzing both the language of fear and the gentle nudges, and to investigate the reason why messages spread via social media about the climate are significantly less likely to be shared than those about other contentious issues, including civil rights, guns, immigration, and women's issues (Fine *et al.* 2024).

While it is true that the language of threat is an effective way of grabbing people's attention, motivating them to pay attention, change their beliefs and take urgent action, it is also true that using fear is not the best tactic to persuade people to do something, as the fear evoked can also be demotivating and counterproductive. Fear can lead to climate change fatigue, passive disengagement, active opposition to climate change policies, and denialism (Saab, 2023). Well-meaning attempts to create urgency about climate change by appealing to fear of disasters or health risks frequently lead to the exact opposite of the desired response: denial, paralysis, apathy, or actions that can create greater risks than the one being mitigated. As Hulme (2009) contends, "the thirst for environmental drama and exaggerated rhetoric risks tipping society onto a negative, depressive and reactionary trajectory".

The 'gentle nudge', instead, helps move the bar from fear to hope, persuading people to choose climate-friendly behaviours that are better for themselves and for the community but without imposing restrictions or significant costs, encouraging socially and environmentally virtuous behaviours, and using words and messages strategically. Recent studies show that affective and participative narratives play a crucial role in shaping public perception and active responses to environmental crises (van Dijk, 2024; Pisano & Salvati, 2025), and that taking meaningful action can help alleviate an individual's feelings of anxiety and powerlessness (Jeremic, 2024).

Thus, starting from the assumption that messages are most likely to be shared when they foster emotional responses (Fine & Hunt, 2023), both of fear and hope, we aim (1) to look both at the negative and at the hopeful rhetoric used by politicians in Europe and in the US, and (2) to understand why the messages of politicians – who have an incentive to engage in more climate negativity online – seem not to generate many retweets.

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Becoming parents at the end of the world: Motherhood, trauma and the climate crisis

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This paper proposes to investigate how climate trauma influences reproductive decisions and the cultural imagination of motherhood. As climate change is increasingly experienced as an existential threat, both individual and collective choices about whether to have children are shaped by fear, ethical uncertainty, and anticipatory grief (Dillarstone et al., 2023). The study draws attention to the emerging phenomenon of pre-traumatic stress disorder (Kaplan, 2020), which encapsulates psychological distress caused not by past events, but by anticipated environmental collapse. Using corpus-linguistic and discourse-analytical methods, the analysis focuses on a body of contemporary newspaper articles that explore how a range of female voices articulate their reflections on whether or not to become parents in the face of the climate crisis. These narratives are often marked by instability, extinction fears, and intergenerational disruption (Kaplan, 2016; Lazar, 2005), intertwining ecological concerns with ethical reflections on responsibility, legacy, and the sustainability of life on Earth (Stibbe, 2021), while also expressing the psychological toll of anticipated collapse (Woodbury, 2019).

By combining ecocritical, corpus-based, and critical discourse approaches (Baker 2006; Fairclough, 2003), the study seeks to illuminate the emotional and ethical dimensions of climate anxiety, foregrounding how cultural narratives frame and complicate one of the most intimate human decisions in an age of ecological precarity.

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An exploration of discourse around ecocentrism in academic books

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The anthropogenic climate and ecological crises are complex ongoing phenomena, mainly following from part of the human population persistently taking advantage of the wealth produced by the industrial revolutions while removing the downsides towards contexts perceived as external and separate (Lele et al. 2018: 2). The set of dominant ideologies supporting the above-described exploitative, externalising attitudes includes different forms and degrees of anthropocentrism (Gupta 2024: 18-19), positing human exceptionalism over other beings and elements of our ecosystems (Lamb 2024: 134).

While considering reality primarily from a human perspective is, up to a point, unavoidable for us as a species, there are ways to conceive of ourselves in relation to reality that diverge from unquestioned centrality and exceptionalism. Therefore, challenging the hegemonic ideologies that characterise ecologically damaging behaviours also requires addressing the dominant definitions and roles we attach to ourselves as humans (Gee 2020) as well our beliefs about non-humans.

Among the attempts put forward to adopt counter-hegemonic, less anthropocentric perspectives is ecocentrism, that places inherent value in all (animate and inanimate) components of nature, prioritising the interests of the entire ecosphere with respect to those of single species (Gupta 2024: ix-x). This contribution thus focuses on scholarly discourse – overall considered to be well-informed and authoritative also in those cultural contexts that are most responsible for the climate and environmental crises – around ecocentrism. The study adopts a corpus-assisted discourse analysis framework, applied to a set of 7 academic books (totalling around 960,000 word-tokens) from the fields of philosophy, social sciences, political science and law, collected in digital format through a bibliographical search on the institutional library catalogue, featuring ecocentrism as the main topic or one of the core topics. Through a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches to these texts (taken both individually and as a corpus), the analysis aims to uncover how ecocentrism is defined, and with which concepts and linguistic patterns it is associated; moreover, it explores the way(s) ecosystems and their elements (animate and inanimate, human and non-human), as well as the relationships among them are represented (or backgrounded) in these texts.

Inspired by Positive Discourse Analysis (Stibbe 2021: 26), this research will hopefully contribute to identifying discourses favouring more ecocentric thought processes, whereby human exceptionalism and the current hegemonic ideologies supporting it can be questioned and challenged at their roots.

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An investigation of the online communicative practices of grassroots environmental activism in India: the case of #SaveHasdeoForest

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Studies show that the environmental emergency is deeply intersectional with matters of social injustice in the Global South (Nesmith et al. 2021), where they are often connected to colonialism (ibid.: 39-43). More specifically, indigenous environmental movements have traditionally been on the frontline in the protection of the environment (Etchart, 2022) and are still spearheading many initiatives to counteract environmental injustice as a form of decolonisation (Dhillon, 2022), in fields such land, water and air quality safeguarding (Martínez-Alier, 2023). India is certainly a territory where ecological matters are frequently interwoven with issues of nationalism, displacement and political agendas whose roots can often be traced back to its colonial history. This contribution aims at investigating the online communicative practices of the #SaveHasdeoForest campaign against deforestation and nationalist policies of hostility towards minority groups and indigenous people in the Chhattisgarh area. A corpus of posts will be analysed through ecolinguistics (Stibbe, 2021;

Zurru, 2022), ecostylistics (Viridis, 2022) and multimodal metaphor studies (Pérez Sobrino, 2017, Zurru, 2024), to explore their communicative strategies and stylistic traits.

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